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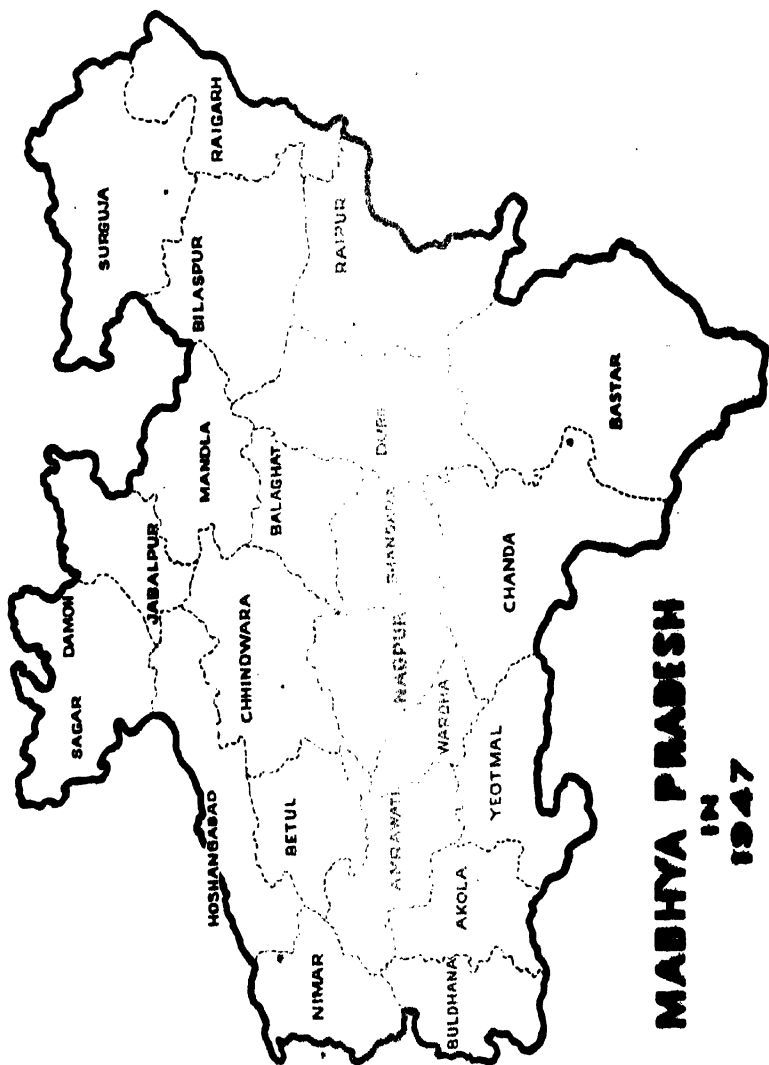
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**THE  
HISTORY OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT  
IN  
MADHYA PRADESH**



**MADHYA PRADESH**  
**IN**  
**1947**

GOVERNMENT OF MADHYA PRADESH



THE  
HISTORY OF FREEDOM  
MOVEMENT

IN

MADHYA PRADESH



NAGPUR  
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1956

## FOREWORD

History of the Freedom Movement is not merely a record of events or recounting of episodes that form part thereof. History of the Freedom Movement is not merely a narrative. It aims at explaining the currents and cross-currents that weave the web of society in ferment. A political struggle is an external expression of an inner dynamic urge in the hearts and minds of the people to be free. The warp and the woof that go to compose the structure of the history are the social and the economic forces that cry out for release which the power interested in maintaining conditions of serfdom tries to withhold. It reflects like a mirror through the actions of men and women associated in that conflict. But these activities are but the reflections of something that is working within the minds of men—some forces that strive to push forth and others that try the curb.

The History of the Freedom Movement prepared by the Madhya Pradesh Government is the expression of forces that constitute an integral part of the all-India struggle. It is gratifying to note that the Madhya Pradesh Government have not satisfied themselves by recounting current events. They have tried to probe a little deeper into the currents of history beginning from early nineteenth century. It may appear to be strange, but it is one of the tragedies of human life, that the people have tried to repose their faith on arms rather too much. Arms are useful but arms without a social philosophy, can only provide a temporary gain or protection. The British Government, devoid of any social philosophy represented in India a force for economic exploitation. The Chapters of History beginning from Bhonsla Resistance reveal imperialistic economic interests with the assistance of arms, and political jugglery working in the name of distributing peace to the people to gain power. But they also reveal the other fact equally grim and tragic. The Indian society was burdened with still more reactionary forces of feudalism and individualism. If on the social side the level of our development had not

progressed beyond individual and caste, on the economic side, the then leaders of the people of India still considered feudalistic order depending not upon its inherent strength to support itself but depending upon worn-out principles and worn-out arms. The Britishers brought to India two things—adventure and organisation. The forces that were trying to resist the British incursion had no organisation. India was lacking in cohesion and superior social philosophy.

But India was soon to learn the new lessons of life, and those who were the conquerors were to hold on to their old lessons. Soon India began, under a challenge of national dependence and crushing economic destitution, to imbibe the philosophy of the time. It realised that the age of feudalism was over and not the arms but the power of the people was a surer guarantee for its freedom. India began to build up on the rocks of a positive philosophy. No longer did it waste its energy in propping up the monarchical and the feudal institutions. It addressed itself to the basic question of the real base which was the root and a source of the nation, namely, the problems of the masses.

The pages that follow show the resurgence of a spirit of adventure and revolt among the masses under the dynamic leadership of the Indian National Congress and Mahatma Gandhi. Bent under the weight of serfdom and poverty, the people had still the inner reserves which the destiny had preserved and luckily for India she received a man charged with a mission and a message to put those inner reserves to use. They were to inundate and drown the forces of imperialism and communalism.

And then the History reaches its climax. The world witnesses on the battle-fields of Europe and Asia forces of reaction and counter-revolution under the Fascist dictatorship trying to submerge the forces of democracy and progress. India is denied the right to contribute with her blood and tears and sorrows and sweat in that fundamental conflict. Not only that but she is called upon to give her blood and sweat at the behest of her imperialist master in the name of democratic and human values. A crisis has been reached and the nation's

leadership makes an appeal to the nation and the nation throws itself into a valiant and glorious struggle to save her dignity and her soul. The world war is over and with it a consciousness in the overlord that he has been trying to withhold a power that cannot any longer be withheld. With this realisation it concedes freedom.

What is freedom ? Political freedom is merely an outward expression of dynamism in a nation determined to work out its social and political philosophies. Political freedom cannot be the end. It is an inevitable intermediate stage which has to be crossed in order to reach the social objectives of the nation. The dawn of Independence is the dawn of fresh responsibility and new resolves. If we again go through the pages of the History of our Freedom Movement, it is to refresh our memories and draw fresh inspiration from the pages of the past. The people of India will look back to those days surely with a degree of satisfaction because of a task partially achieved, but more surely and decidedly to remind themselves that the task has still to be completed and in order to complete that task we still need an unshakable faith in our country's destiny and the social philosophy and the social values that characterised our struggle. May the History of the Freedom Movement provide us with that inspiration and that stimulus.

U. N. DHEBAR,

October 8, 1956.

*President, Indian National Congress.*



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## INTRODUCTION

To trace the stream of a national movement in terms of a single Province or State would appear to be as impossible a venture as to separate the waters of a river from the ocean it feeds. The irresistible mass movement, which gathered power as it advanced and brought about our liberation, was the expression of the united will of the people of our country without distinction of provinces and classes. Therefore, the editors of this "History of Freedom Movement in Madhya Pradesh" became convinced at an early stage of their undertaking that the narrative would inevitably draw within its scope the all-India movements and currents of thought which swelled the volume of our struggle. In the earlier phases of the movement, especially before the birth of the Congress, when the seeds of discontent were taking shape, it is possible to isolate and describe the first stirrings of the spirit within a particular province. These first stirrings were visible in the Central Provinces as early as in the period when the East India Company first secured a foothold in Nagpur. No sooner was the independence of the Bhonsla Kingdom surrendered by the signing of the Subsidiary Alliance than the beginnings of a movement emerging out of this subjection became visible. It is for this reason that our narrative starts from that point. Thereafter, until almost the end of the century this urge for liberation can be continuously traced within the province. The streams of the First War of Independence of 1857 were, however, of an all-India nature, and although they spent themselves in unsuccess they never entirely dried up. It was, however, only towards the end of the century, after the Indian National Congress had begun to serve as the mouthpiece of India's desire for freedom, that a united national movement began to establish itself. From this point onwards, Madhya Pradesh was merely one of the units in the political history of India. Events in one part of the country acted and reacted

upon the others and shaped the policies of the all-India organisations. This history, therefore, might perhaps be called with greater justice the History of the Freedom Movement in India with special reference to Madhya Pradesh. The emphasis throughout has been placed on events in Madhya Pradesh, though against the vast background of India as a whole.

Not only was it found necessary to give to this narrative such an all-India character, but it was also inevitable that the inter-play of forces between Government on the one hand and popular movements on the other should have been taken into account. This narrative could not, by its very nature, be merely the story of the Congress. All the elements that went to make up the shaping forces during the last century and a half were inevitable parts of our narrative. We had not only to assess the impact on India of changes in the structure of Government both at Delhi and in London, but we had also to estimate the contribution of world forces to our political struggle.

It so happens that this history of our struggle for freedom sponsored by the Government of Madhya Pradesh is the first to make its appearance. No other State has yet published a complete narrative of the freedom movement from its beginnings to the date of India's Independence. Since this is something of a pioneering effort it would be excusable on our part to attempt to cover not merely provincial affairs but also the all-India picture. In doing so it has been our endeavour to restrict as much as possible the scope of the narrative while constantly keeping in view the completeness of the picture which should emerge out of it. Such imperfections, as there may be, are more of omission than of commission. This was partly an inevitable result of the conditions of urgency under which we had to complete the work. When the project was first undertaken none of us was aware that so soon a rearrangement of the State boundaries would take place dislocating the territorial unit for which this survey was intended. As the date fixed for the break up of the old State and the formation of new Madhya Pradesh drew near we had to race against time and complete our task. May be, if this urgency had not presented itself we could have done greater

justice to the inspiring theme and further enriched the narrative.

It was at first intended to divide the narration into four periods, the first tracing the events up to and including the first war of independence, miscalled the "Sepoy Mutiny", and the second continuing the narrative from that point up to the foundation of the Congress. It was with this view that the task was assigned to four different editors, each being held responsible for one portion. But it soon became clear that it would not be easy to keep to this arrangement. For one thing, the aftermath of the Great Revolt of 1857 encroached fairly deep into the post-revolt period. Secondly, many of the forces, which led to the birth and the shape of the Congress, had already begun to appear long before the year 1885 when the Congress was actually founded. Therefore, the matter was finally rearranged in three parts, as it is now presented. After considerable thought we have decided to give to each of these parts a descriptive title which attempts to sum up the main feature of the movement during the period. These titles represent the three phases of the freedom movement, the early method of revolt followed by a period of polite petitioning and culminating in the unique resistance movement of Non-violent Non-co-operation under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. Through all these phases, it is our conviction, that a continuity of effort can be perceived: a persistent and unyielding endeavour of a subject nation to shake itself free and reassert its birthright.

Although the original draft was made by four different pens, the reader would find harmony of ideas and expression throughout the work. This would have been impossible to achieve but for the assistance received by me from Shri V. S. Krishnan, the Assistant Editor-in-Chief. I find it difficult to thank him adequately for the great contribution he has made to the timely completion of this work. In a work of this nature it is, of course, impossible to give satisfaction to any but the most indulgent reader, and it is, perhaps, unnecessary to add that the responsibility for all the errors of omission and commission is mine alone.

A special word of gratitude is due to the Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, the Chairman of the Committee appointed for this purpose, for his deep interest in our work. Being himself one of the outstanding fighters in the freedom movement, his career in the struggle almost coincided with the career of the Congress. It is no exaggeration to say that but for his enthusiasm, practical assistance and constant support, our task would hardly have been completed.

The Board of Editors is highly indebted to Shri U. N. Dhebar, the President of the Indian National Congress, for associating himself with our humble effort by very kindly contributing the Foreword.

SAGAR :

*The 12th October 1956.*

D. P. MISHRA,

*Editor-in-Chief.*

PART ONE

Revolt and Repression





## CHAPTER I

### BHONSLA RESISTANCE

After winning the make-believe battle of Plassey, Clive wrote: "I am fully persuaded that after the Battle of Plassey, I could have appropriated the whole country to the Company and preserved it afterwards with as much ease as Mir Jaffier, the present Subah now does, through the fear of the English arms and their influence.". Clive and his tribe were at least honest about their actions and did not clothe them in sanctimonious phrases. They called loot and forgery by their genuine names and were content. It was another generation of rulers that gilded their aggrandizement by high-sounding terms, such as Subsidiary Alliance and Doctrine of Lapse. A century later other terms were coined, often reduced to alphabets, in the form of various Treaty Organizations.

But subjugation has its odour by whatever name it may be called. The name that was beloved of Wellesley was Subsidiary Alliance. He pointed out how it had the advantage of keeping "the evils of war at a distance from the sources of our wealth and our power"—a process of bleeding white without shedding blood. But what the Empire Builders did not learn was that they built their edifices on a volcano of suppressed feelings and bitter humiliation. The fires may be driven underground, but they smoulder and burn silently and wait only for an opportunity to erupt. Resistance to oppression is a law of Nature. Therefore, the origins of resistance in Madhya Pradesh have to be traced to the period when the bonds of foreign rule were fastened on it with the signing of the Subsidiary Alliance in 1816. Strangely enough it was Appa Saheb Bhonsle who had signed away the freedom of these territories that took the lead in the resistance.

A significant and impressive ceremony took place at the Court of the Raja of Nagpur on 25th November 1817. Appa Saheb Bhonsle, who had ascended the *Gadi* in February 1817 at the sudden and mysterious death of Parsoji, drove in state to his army camp, and in the presence of his ministers, army chiefs and nobles of the kingdom he was invested with the *Khilat*, the robes of honour presented to him by the Peshwa. He was also decorated with the emblem of Imperial Command, the *Jari Patka* and the title of Senapati. These marks of recognition by which the new Bhonsla King proclaimed himself a member of the Maratha

Confederacy under the Peshwa's leadership would at any time have had considerable political significance ; but in November 1817, it was a political portent. For, on the 5th November 1817, the Peshwa, Baji Rao II, had made a sudden and dramatic attack on the British Residency at Poona and captured it with little difficulty. The Peshwa and the British were, thus, at open war. In this context the ceremonial acceptance of the honours and titles from the Peshwa by Appa Saheb could have only one political meaning--a meaning that was not lost on Mr. Jenkins, the Nagpur Resident. When Ramachandra Wagh, the trusted minister of Appa Saheb, personally delivered to Mr. Jenkins an invitation to be present and assist at the investiture ceremony, his reply was a firm remonstrance against " the acceptance of the Khilat or of any titles from a power now at open war with the British ", and a flat refusal to give the sanction of his presence to such an act.

The protests of the Resident, however, proved of no avail. Appa Saheb's answer to it was to post his troops immediately in a strong position to attack the Residency, if necessary. The investiture did, in fact, set the seal on a concerted plan between the Peshwa and Appa Saheb to join in an effort to overthrow the British power and establish their independence. Ever since Appa Saheb came in full possession of the kingdom of Nagpur he had been contemplating the removal of the lengthening shadows of British influence and " the restoration of the Maratha empire to its pristine splendour and powers ". This meant, indeed, to continue the policy of his uncle, Raghoji II, whose correspondence with Peshwa, Sindhia and Holkar had the object of promoting a spirit of concert and union amongst all Marathas, directed against the British ascendancy (Prinsep's *Transactions*, Vol. I, p. 358). In pursuance of this object he had been in correspondence with Baji Rao II. He had been kept informed of the gathering of forces at Poona since the latter part of October. Their plan was to strike simultaneously at the seats of British power at Poona and Nagpur, to surprise the forces at both these capitals, and sweep them from their territories, so that their independence which, by their Subsidiary Alliance they had forfeited, may be won back again.

The Peshwa and Appa Saheb had both made their way to power through the expediency of the Subsidiary Alliance. This Alliance was an ingenious method of enslavement, which owed its origin to Lord Wellesley, and had successfully destroyed the independence of all the powerful States of India. It was a curious system of double-government under which real power was in the hands of the British Resident, while the responsibility for good or

bad government lay with the ruler. Henry Lawrence, writing in 1846, observed truly:

"If there was a device for ensuring mal-government, it is that of a native ruler and minister both relying on foreign bayonets, and directed by a British Resident."

Another able administrator of the period, Sir Thomas Munro, was also equally critical of this arrangement. Writing to the Governor-General in 1817, he said:

"There are many weighty objections to the employment of a subsidiary force. It has a natural tendency to render the government of every country in which it exists weak and oppressive, to extinguish all honourable spirit among the higher class of society, and to degrade and impoverish the people."

Most of the British Residents or Agents, barring some rare exceptions, exercised "the harlot's privilege of having power without responsibility" (Nehru: *Discovery of India*).

The Subsidiary Alliance was negotiated on behalf of Appa Saheb by his two trusted ministers, Nago Pant and Narayan Pandit, who met Jenkins on the night of 24th April 1816. After some prolonged negotiations regarding the terms of the Alliance an agreement was finally reached on all points, including the size and composition of the subsidiary force which was fixed at six battalions and one regiment of Horse of which two battalions were to be stationed at Nagpur. The Raja was to pay annually Rs. 7½ laks for maintaining the subsidiary force, it being stipulated that in the event of any irregularity in the payment of this subsidy, the British Government would be entitled to demand the cession of territory within the Bhonsla kingdom yielding an equivalent annual revenue. In addition, the Raja was to maintain at his own cost a force of 3,000 Horse and 2,000 Foot, in the discipline and management of which the British Resident would have the right of giving advice. One interesting stipulation which, the minister of Appa Saheb insisted on including in the treaty, has a curious historical interest. They were keen that it should be specified that cows and bullocks should not be killed within the Nagpur territory. This was, however, refused. The Resident only gave a verbal assurance that no cows or bullocks would be killed on any account within the city itself, but the troops, when in the field, were not to be restricted in this particular (Prinsep's *Transactions*, Vol. I, p. 364).

Having settled all the terms of the treaty satisfactorily, a meeting was arranged in great secrecy in dead of night on the 27th May 1816 in the house of Nago Pant at Nagpur. Here Appa Saheb put his signature to this historic document in the presence of the Resident. In view of the strong opposition to a Subsidiary Alliance which a group in the palace had steadily maintained, it was agreed not to make this document public until the subsidiary force provided in the treaty had actually reached within a day's march of the city. This it did on the 8th of June 1816, and on the following day the treaty was made public\*.

Such was the manner in which this great Kingdom of the Bhonslas, situated in a strategic position in the centre of the Peninsula, striding across the Narmada valley and the Satpura range down to the borders of the Nizam's Dominion, fell into the clutches of the British power. Henry Prinsep, the contemporary historian, describes it as—

“the most important extension of the system of our relations with the native powers of India that had taken place since the general settlement of them 10 years before”†.

It had been the anxious desire of the British to bring this area within their sphere of influence so that the gap between the territories in the north and the south, which had already submitted to them, could be bridged. Appa Saheb, like his colleague, Baji Rao II, accepted this humiliating agreement under the well-known principle of expediency that “the end justifies the means”. To both of them the Subsidiary Alliance was only a means to the achievement of political power. Once they had been firmly established

\*Sir John Malcolm referring to the Subsidiary Alliance with Nagpur says “in the actual condition of India, no event could be more fortunate than the Subsidiary Alliance with Nagpur.”

†“The arrangement enables me to leave unguarded about three hundred miles of frontier, for which I had difficulty to allot defence; it totally over-sets the plan at which Scindiah has been secretly working for inducing the Peshwa to re-establish the Mahratta confederacy, it deprives Scindiah of troops and treasure, on which he calculated in all his hostile speculations; it gives n.e. by the junction of Colonel Doveton's Corps with the Nagpur forces, an efficient army on the open flank of Scindiah's country, and it renders the interception of the Pindaries, should they venture another inroad into our southern territories, almost certain. I regard this event as giving me the fairest ground of confidence that I shall be able to achieve all I wish to effect for the Company's interest without any war. this rests on our presumption of the Peshwa's fidelity: If he be treacherous (and there is no answering for a Mahratta) we might have a struggle, but the consequences of such a contest could not now be doubtful, and it would only make the ultimate arrangement more beneficial to the Company”. (Private Journal of Lord Hastings, entry on June 1, 1816.)

in their kingdoms they do little time in concerting a plan to oust the British and restore the glory and independence of their Confederacy.

Commenting on what transpired later, Prinsep says:

“Judging from subsequent events, it would seem to have been regarded by the contracting party as a mere stepping stone to absolute authority in internal affairs, a necessary expedient at the moment for breaking a formidable faction backed by a still more formidable soldiery.”

He adds further on:

“Indeed, from the time that Appa Saheb felt himself secure in the full possession of the honours and authority of the Raj, he ceased to regard British alliance as a necessary prop to his rule and began to be sensible of the humiliation of appearing to the Maratha nation as the first of the Bhonsla dynasty who had made a voluntary sacrifice of political independence.”

It is, therefore, not surprising that no sooner was he well established in power than he got into secret contact with the other Maratha Powers with the object of uniting with them to shake off the British connection. He particularly exchanged correspondence with Bajirao in the months of April and May 1817, when the latter was himself making preparations in Poona for attacking the Residency. They exchanged assurances of mutual support and concerted action when the time came to strike. Their plan was to strike suddenly with overwhelming forces at the Residencies of Poona and Nagpur when the major part of the British forces were engaged in a desultory action against the Pindaris and their armies scattered in different parts of Central India. The leaders of the Pindaris could be trusted to engage the British in a never-ending chase in the meanwhile. If the plan succeeded the British would disappear from the Deccan as swiftly as they had appeared there.

But the best-laid schemes of mice and men do often go awry. The first to strike was the Peshwa. On the 5th November a large army of infantry, cavalry and mounted guns, which had gathered on the Parvati Hill, with Baji Rao at its head, swooped down on the Residency at Poona. The Resident, Mr. Elphinstone, and his men managed to retreat across the river Moola, and join the brigade at Kirkee. The Residency and the houses and valuable property with large quantities of records fell into the hands of the Peshwa. He then advanced on the British brigade at Kirkee. The battle was fought fiercely, the heavy guns of the Peshwa opening a steady cannonade, while Bapu Gokhale, the Peshwa's General, made a

spirited charge on the left flank of the Resident's forces and succeeded in surrounding a detachment. In the desperate fight that ensued one of the gallant soldiers of the Marathas, Moro Dikshit, who was entrusted with the honour of guarding the *Jari Patka*, the Maratha standard, was killed. Next day the British army was heavily reinforced by the battalions that joined them from the south and from the east. They returned to the charge with added vigour, and were able to recapture Poona. The battle of Kirkee proved a grave defeat to the Peshwa's forces and they had to fly southwards, hotly pursued by General Smith.

It is probable that the attack on Nagpur Residency was meant to synchronise with the Peshwa's attack on Poona. But Appa Sahab was still biding his time. As if to defy the overbearing Resident, who was attempting to strengthen his position by calling for reinforcement from Col. Adam's division south of the Narmada, Appa Sahab chose the 24th November as the date for the ceremonial investiture of *Khilat* and *Jari Patka*, as described earlier. That he chose to challenge the Resident by this patently defiant gesture at a time when the Peshwa was himself in flight, gave to his act a sharper edge. He answered Jenkins' refusal to attend the Court ceremony by posting his men in an attacking position, and on 26th November at about sunset, his Arab infantry fired upon the Residency pickets.

Thus began the historic Battle of Sitabuldi which, during about twenty hours of fierce fighting, came very near to ousting the British from these parts. Of the two hills of Sitabuldi, connected by a ridge, the northern hill was manned by Captain Sadler and three hundred men under him. On the 27th, the Arab infantry of Appa Sahab, which had kept up an artillery fire all the morning, succeeded in killing Captain Sadler and seriously wounding his Second-in-Command, besides inflicting severe loss in men and equipment. Seeing the confused state to which the British troops on this hill had been reduced, the Raja's infantry rushed up the hill and captured the position including the 6-pounder gun which they now turned upon the other hill, where the rest of the British forces were stationed. It proved immediately successful, killing three of the officers, including the Resident's First Assistant, George Southey. It appeared that the capture of the second hill would also be effected immediately, after which the Residency could not resist.

But at this moment, reinforcements came to the rescue of the British forces. Captain Fitzgerald led a column of his reserves

from the Residency grounds, and in a desperate charge succeeded in reaching the smaller hill, while his cavalry took possession of the guns set up by the Arab infantry. By about the afternoon of the 27th, the Raja's forces were dispersed from the surrounding houses and villages, and the battle of Sitabuldi was lost. British troops poured into Nagpur from every quarter, for they knew that it was of the greatest importance that "the Bhonsla should be crushed as early as possible in order that the other potentates might be deterred from following in the same career". Appa Sahib, seeing that discretion was the better part of valour, sent his vakils to the Resident expressing his sorrow at what had happened, and regretting the attack which he wholly disavowed. He knew that it was more conducive to his interest, with the prospect of making a more successful attempt later, if he now temporised with the British and retained his power over his dominions, rather than be forced to an ineffectual flight like Baji Rao. He, therefore, mounted his horse, and accompanied by his two ministers, Nago Pant and Ramachandra Wagh, rode to the Residency and surrendered himself to Jenkins. Assurances were given to the Resident that the army would be disbanded. The conditions offered by the Resident stated, among other things, that Appa Sahib should reside within the Residency. The resistance shown by some of his troops, especially those led by the Sirdars Mun Bhut and Ganpat Rao, was gradually broken by the superior forces under General Doveton, and the Bhonsla palace was captured and the British flag flew over it. It was the intention of the Resident to leave the Raja shorn of all powers for future resistance. As Prinsep says with engaging frankness ;

"Mr. Jenkins was resolved to assume and act upon the principle of reducing the head of the Bhonsla State to the condition of a mere pageant, and giving the British Government a control over every branch of internal as well as of external administration, to the extent of imposing a ministry of its own selection."

To make the subordination complete and tangible, the Sitabuldi hills were to be fortified by the British, and the whole country to have practically a military occupation. In addition, the Raja was required to cede in perpetuity territories equal to the full charge of the subsidiary force. The districts demanded were those to the north of the Narmada, besides Surguja, Jashpur, Sohagpur and Sambalpur to the east, all the valley to the south of the river and as far as Chhapara, together with Multai, Betul, Gwaligarh and all the remaining possessions of the Raja in Berar.



These terms were agreed to by Appa Saheb, and he returned to his own palace on 9th January 1818. But it was not to be expected that he would accept meekly conditions so galling and suicidal. The desperate pass to which he had been reduced forced him to concede the terms at the time. But as soon as he entered his own palace once again, on which he saw the hated British flag fly, he began to meditate the means to retrieve his lost fortunes and rehabilitate his independence. He issued secret instructions to the Qiledars of his fortresses in Mandla and Chauragarh not to surrender them to the British if they attempted to occupy them. He ordered the captain of the Chanda fort to recruit forces, especially Arabs. He held secret consultations with his trusted advisers, Nago Pant and Ramachandra Wagh. He also took the precaution of sending his treasure to Chanda and other forts, so that it may not be within easy grasp of the Resident. At the same time he sent messengers to Baji Rao, who had all this while been evading the British pursuit, to come to his aid. On 14th March, one of the messengers sent by Appa Saheb was seized by the Resident's agents but fortunately they could not get hold of the letter which the messenger was carrying to Baji Rao.

The person to whom this appeal for aid was made was, in the meanwhile, advancing to the east, having successfully outmanoeuvred the British who were pursuing him from three directions. At a village called Koregaon, on the last day of the year 1817, a bitter fight ensued between the Peshwa's forces and a detachment under Captain Staunton. The Arab regiment under the Peshwa made a determined attack, killing three of the British officers and wounding two, besides causing a large number of casualties among the men. But in a desperate countercharge the British forced the Peshwa's army to retreat, and move towards south-east. Another fierce clash between the Peshwa and the British pursuers took place on 20th February at Ashti which was noted for the brilliant generalship and heroic death of Bapu Gokhale, the Peshwa's distinguished general. Bapu was among those patriots who were fired by a passion to restore the Maratha empire to its ancient splendour. He was the genius behind all the military plans of the Peshwa. He was always to be found at the post of the greatest danger. After his death there was none to take his place, so that from now on Baji Rao himself had to direct the operations.

It was at Ashti that the Peshwa received the messengers sent to him by Appa Saheb soliciting his aid. They brought a letter in the handwriting of Appa Saheb, containing a brief despatch reading, "Sumana Meer to Gangana Dobeeya", i.e., "assist me in any way you can". The names contained in the letter were those

of two saints well-known in Marathi legend for their timely help to each other in the hour of danger. The Peshwa sent back the Nagpur messengers with a written reply promising all help. He had also received information that at Chanda preparations for war were being made, and that a force under Chandoji Bhonsla had gathered at Bhandara. The fortresses of Mandla and Chauragarh were reported to be put in a condition to stand a siege, and the hill people were up in arms.

Thus encouraged, Baji Rao marched in the direction of Chanda hoping to effect a junction with Appa Sahab's forces. The advance division of the Maratha army reached the banks of the Wardha early in April at a point near Wani where the Wardha joins the Painganga. The British, who had received information that Chanda was to be the rallying point of resistance, had in the meanwhile ordered several detachments in this direction to intercept such a move, and, so, Colonel Scott with the greater part of the Nagpur forces reached Warora almost at the same time that Baji Rao reached Wani. Another British force went through Hinganghat towards the Wardha, and a third advanced up to Pandharkawada.

The battle was fought at a place called Seonce, about 12 miles north of Pandharkawada. It was a desperate engagement. Baji Rao was surrounded by the forces of the British marching towards him from three directions. At no time was the loss of the leadership and courage of Bapu Gokhale felt so bitterly as on this occasion. Against the heavy firing from horse-artillery from all directions, the Peshwa's army could not make a determined stand. They, therefore, adopted the only course open to them, namely, to break up into small groups and escape through the surrounding jungles.

The British army then advanced on Chanda where Bhujangrao, Zamindar of Ahiri, and his brother Kondu Bapu, had fortified themselves and had undertaken a large-scale recruitment to their army, especially Arabs and Pindaris. The British troops laid siege to the strong fort of Chanda, which, however, could not hope to hold out for long. The Qiledar of the fort, Ganga Singh, distinguished himself by his valour and put up stout resistance. The British troops were able to effect a breach and enter the fortress. Ganga Singh died a hero's death, fighting to the last, and it is recorded that even the English Captain who captured the fort openly expressed his admiration for the heroism of the Qiledar.

For two months the scattered forces of Baji Rao fought desultorily in different parts of the Bhonsla dominions, some espousing the cause of Appa Saheb, some as mere adventurers and some joining isolated groups of Pindaris. Baji Rao himself, with a small remnant of his army went towards Asirgarh, and later finding himself bereft of men and means, surrendered himself to Sir John Malcolm on 18th June 1818. He had to pass the rest of his life on the banks of the Ganges at a place called Bithur, near Cawnpur, where he, no doubt, filled the young mind of his adopted son, later known as Nana Saheb, with that passionate zeal to drive away the foreign power from his motherland, which was to burst into action in 1857.

The cause of Appa Saheb found another champion in Lanji, further east of Nagpur, where a powerful Zamindar, Chimna Patel, raised the standard of revolt. Chimna Patel had reason to be grateful to Appa Saheb not only because of the long association of his family with the Bhonslas, but because Appa Saheb had always treated him with friendliness and trust. He attacked the Kamavisdar of Lanji, seized his person and killed and captured many of his men. On hearing this, the Resident of Nagpur sent a large force under Captain Gordon who, however, found it not easy to reach the place owing to the difficulty in crossing the Kanhan and Vainganga rivers. Chimna Patel had in the meanwhile fortified himself at Kamtha which commanded a strong defensive position. The two forces met at a village called Navargaoon where a fierce engagement was fought. The forces of Chimna Patel, finding their position precarious, withdrew inside the fort of Kamtha which was soon surrounded by Captain Gordon. The whole day they held out in the fort against heavy bombardment by the British forces. Ultimately the gate of the fort was forced open with the aid of elephants and Kamtha was captured at a considerable cost. The British forces followed up this success with the capture of the remaining fortresses in this region, especially Ambagad and Warad. The revolt was suppressed and Chimna Patel was confined a prisoner in his own fort of Kamtha.

To return to Nagpur where events had rapidly moved to a climax. The British Resident had watched with growing uneasiness the frequent messages that were passing between Appa Saheb and the Peshwa. Intercepted papers seemed to indicate a deep plan between them to join their forces in another effort to attack the British forces. It was rumoured that the Raja was about to fly to Chanda to join Baji Rao. Jenkins, therefore, decided to act immediately without waiting for instructions from

the Governor-General. On the 15th March, he sent a picket party of soldiers under Captain Browne to the Bhonsla palace where they broke into the apartments of Appa Sahib and arrested him along with his two ministers Nago Pant and Ramachandra Wagh. The whole thing was done so suddenly, that no resistance was possible. The prisoners were brought to the Residency and placed in close confinement under separate guards. To lend a colour of justification for this highhanded act Appa Sahib was now accused, for the first time, of the murder of Parsoji.

Nothing further was, however, done at the moment because the British were then preoccupied with stopping the advance of the Peshwa. After the battle of Seonee had succeeded in scattering Baji Rao's forces, Jenkins turned his attention to Appa Sahib. Meanwhile the Governor-General also had informed the resident that Appa Sahib should be escorted in safe custody to Allahabad, where an old palace of the Mughals had been selected as a place suitable for his confinement. On the 3rd May 1818, Appa Sahib with his two ministers was marched off from Nagpur, under a strong escort led by the same Captain Browne, who had violated the privacy of the Raja and arrested him in his own apartments.

The road that lay in front of them was the historic Nagpur-Jabalpur road, which through centuries had been a vital highway across the Bhonsla territory connecting the south with the north. On 3rd May 1818, the compact and colourful troop escorting the prisoners and consisting of four companies of sepoys and a squadron of horse marched northwards along this road. The route lay through mountainous and thickly wooded country largely occupied by Gonds, with the hordes of Pindaris ensconced safely in their hilly fastnesses. Captain Browne and his men were anxious to cover the ground as quickly as possible, halting only when darkness or sickness forced them to do so. In fact when Appa Sahib desired to stop for a day at Raxatek so that he might worship at the historic temple built there by his ancestors, Captain Browne would not hear of it.

Meanwhile, it would seem that the senior Rani of Appa Sahib Umabai, had secretly despatched a trusted man named Ganga Singh with a few others, who had been tested for their unquestionable loyalty, and furnished them with adequate money to effect the deliverance of her husband. While Captain Browne and the escort halted for the night at Puzdar on the 5th May, a small party of sixteen Hindustani soldiers joined them. At first Captain Browne was suspicious and when, on being

questioned, they could not give him a satisfactory account of themselves, he ordered them to be disarmed. But later the leader of the batch produced a note, apparently signed by Captain Dunsmure, establishing the *bona fides* of these men. Thereupon their arms were restored to them, and they followed the escort on their onward journey.

On 12th May, Captain Browne and his men reached Rachur, a place about 30 miles from Jabalpur, and they decided to camp there for the night. The tent where Appa Sahab was lodged was strongly guarded by batches of six sentries, each doing duty in shifts throughout the night. It would appear that the platoon that joined the escort *en route* at Puzdar managed to take on guard-duty in the night, and had their plans ready for the rescue of Appa Sahab. This guard was due to be relieved at 3 a.m. on the night of the 12/13th May. A little before that hour one of them went into the tent, made Appa Sahab put on a sepoy's uniform, shuffled up the bed-clothes to resemble the form of a sleeping person, and then walked back to his tent and thence into the night. Appa Sahab, dressed in the sepoy's uniform, joined the other sentries, mounted guard for the few minutes that still remained before the next sentries relieved them at 3 a.m. Thereafter it was easy enough for him to walk away quite unsuspected with his rescuers in the darkness. The wild countryside and the night rendered their escape safe.

The flight was undetected till daybreak. A non-commissioned officer of the guard that assumed duty at 3 a.m., perhaps anxious to win his Commission by his zeal, peeped into the tent to make sure that the prisoner was there. He saw in the dim light the rounded form on the mattress and was satisfied. It was only in the morning when the escort struck tent and made ready to resume the march that the escape of Appa Sahab was detected. A hue and cry was raised immediately. A muster of all men was ordered at once, which revealed that the six men, who had mounted guard at the tent before his escape, were also missing. Their names were Ramdin Singh, Umed Singh Chhatri, Andan Singh Chhatri, Sital Misra, Bentar Singh and Nida Upadhyay—all members of the party of Hindustani sepoys who joined the escort at Puzdar.

Confusion and alarm possessed the escort camp. Search parties were sent in all directions. Wild reports reached the camp, many of them mutually contradictory, regarding the movements of the fugitives. Some said that they had been sighted at Pathalghuttee, about 12 *kos* north of Dhuma. Others said that they had

seen them going in the direction of Hurrai. Captain Browne sent a party of horse to Lanji, two squadrons under Major Cumming who commanded the 7th Cavalry Regiment were despatched towards Hurrai. But pursuit proved of no avail. The impregnable forests and friendly chieftains in the neighbourhood effectively concealed the flight of Appa Saheb. The common people in the villages in whose minds the person of the former King was clothed with the sanctity of royalty, welcomed him to their abodes. The result was that after a few days of futile search Captain Browne had to report to Nagpur that all his search parties had come back without any success. Captain C. Browne himself, who had to bear the main responsibility for the escape of Appa Saheb was court-martialled on a charge of negligence of duty. It would, however, appear that no convincing evidence of his neglect was available, and he was, therefore, acquitted and posted back to his regiment.\*

It would be interesting to speculate what sort of man was Appa Saheb, who at a comparatively young age assumed the leadership of resistance to the British power in this territory. At the time that he was deposed and arrested, Appa Saheb could not have been more than 21 or 22 years of age. For his age he undoubtedly appears to have been a man of extraordinary shrewdness and political insight. Impetuous he obviously was, and also inordinately ambitious. Even during the time of his uncle, Raghuji II, he had proved himself a leader of ability. In fact the initial antipathy which Raghuji II exhibited towards him was due to his awareness that Appa Saheb was bound to oust his own imbecile son, Parsoji, from the throne sooner or later. And yet, in his dying moments, Raghuji II had wisely summoned Appa Saheb to his bedside and entrusted to him the care of Parsoji. It is, therefore, no wonder that his escape from the escort of Captain Browne was the beginning of a desperate attempt to organise a large-scale resistance against the British. The story of Appa Saheb from this moment onwards is a story of undaunted and persistent endeavour to gather a striking force, win friendly support and to build up a sufficiently strong opposition against the British with the aid of kings and chieftains from all over the country, from the Gond chieftains of Pachmarhi up to Ranjit Singh of Lahore.

\*The trial by court martial of Capt. Browne took place at Hnshangabad on 25th July. The Judgment said :

"The court having maturely weighed and considered the whole of the evidence for and against the prisoner, together with what he has urged in his defence, and the summing up of the Deputy Judge Advocate, are of the opinion that Capt. Browne is not guilty of the charge alleged against him, and they do fully and honourably acquit him of the whole and every part thereof."



## CHAPTER II

### THE WANDERINGS OF APPA SAHEB

After Appa Saheb and his companions had made good their escape, they appear to have proceeded towards the Mahadeo Hills in the Satpuras where Thakur Mohan Singh of Pachmarhi, Chain Shah, Raja of Hurrai and several Gond chieftains could be depended upon to support him. With the help of these leaders Appa Saheb planned to organise a strong enough force before he openly attacked the British. It is a tribute to the loyalty and honour of these chieftains and zamindars that the fabulous prize of two lakhs of rupees and a jagir worth Rs. 10,000 a year which the British authorities had offered as a reward for the apprehension of Appa Saheb, did not tempt anyone of them to betray him. Nor, for that matter, were even the common villagers of Betul, Mandla, and Hoshangabad where Appa Saheb freely wandered, tempted by such a rich award to play false to him. On the contrary, thousands of men in every part of this area eagerly offered themselves for recruitment into Appa Saheb's forces, and within a short time after his escape it was estimated that he had under him an army of about 20,000 men. They consisted mainly of Gonds, Arabs and Sikhs, and included some disbanded soldiers of Baji Rao and a large number of Pindaries.

An indication of the gathering strength of Appa Saheb is seen in a letter of the Jabalpur Commandant addressed to Jenkins, Resident at Nagpur, dated 24th July 1818. He says :

"By daily reports from Seoni, Chhapara and Addagaon, it would appear that the Gonds and followers of Appa Saheb are daily gaining strength and committing excessive depredations in all the districts south of Deogarh hills. They write to me from Chhindwara and Chaurai that all the villages there are desolate and some in Seoni have also suffered. If this mischief increases, I must take some of the troops from this town and try if we cannot drive them back into their mountains."

So widespread appeared to be the support that the cause was receiving, that Capt. Adams who commanded the subsidiary force says in one of his letters to Jenkins :

"I certainly am of the opinion that our attention should be principally directed to the confinement, if possible, of Appa Saheb to his present circumscribed situation and to the preven-



tion of considerable bodies from effecting a junction, an object which, it appears to me, can only be properly effected by having strong detachments in healthy and commanding positions."

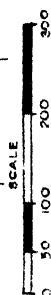
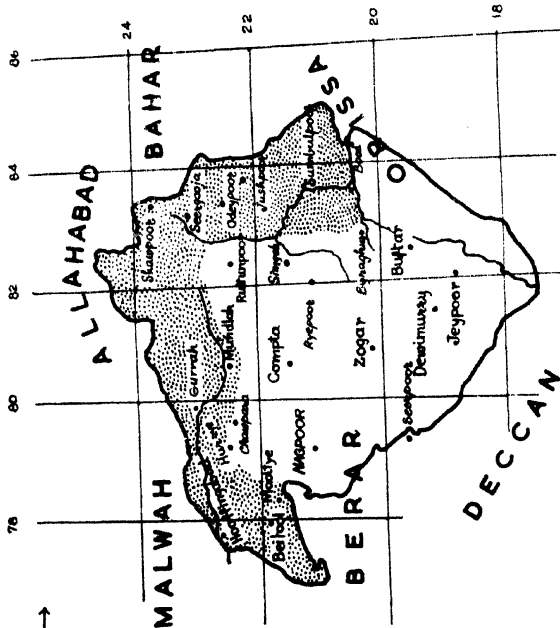
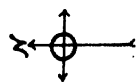
Yet, in spite of all these efforts, the number of those who came to the support of Appa Saheb increased from day to day. We are told that one of the influential Gonds, a Jagirdar of Sagar, was in correspondence with him. On 31st August 1818, J. H. Maddock, Assistant to the Governor-General, writing to Brigadier-General Watson, commanding a Division in Sagar, says :

"I have already been given to understand that one of the Gond chiefs who is a Jagirdar of Sagar has been in treasonable communication with Appa Saheb. It seems more likely that the arrival of an emissary of his to sound the minds of the late Government of Sagar and of other Jagirdars has given rise to the conversations which were overheard by the two persons whose depositions were taken down, so that any night an attack for the object of plunder has been meditated on the town of Sagar."

About a month later, in September 1818, we have again a reference which indicates the support which the cause was gaining. In a letter from C. A. Mallony, Commissioner of Narmada, it is stated :

"Raja Keerut Singh has been in intrigue with Appa Saheb. He lives at Patna and Bullaha. I have summoned him. If he attends, I shall be able to prevent him continuing his aid to Appa Saheb, but if he refuses to attend, I shall take measures against him."

One of the earliest successes which Appa Saheb's army had was near Betul where a large body of his men, estimated to number about 15,000 had gathered. Captain Sparke, who was at Betul, heard of this concentration and, with a strong force of about 3,000 soldiers, fell upon them on 20th July. In the skirmish Captain Sparke and all his men were killed and only a few servants of the Captain returned to Betul to tell the story. The army of Appa Saheb took possession of Melghat, Bhainsdehi, Satner and Amla. Meanwhile, a strong regiment of the British marched on Multai which had, by that time, been evacuated by Appa Saheb. Chagrined at the failure to capture him, the British arrested three leading zamindars of Multai who had been known to have helped Appa Saheb, summarily tried them by court-martial, and hanged them.



Acquisitions of Territory resulting from  
the late war bordered



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# MAP OF BHOSLA KINGDOM (1818)



By the end of the year, however, it became clear that a strong resistance against the British was not possible if Appa Saheb kept himself confined to the Mahadeo Hills region. In fact, detachments of the British army marching from different directions had practically surrounded this area. It was, therefore, decided that he should leave the Mahadeo Hills. But it was no easy matter to penetrate the ring of the British army especially because of the heavy prize that had been proclaimed on Appa Saheb's head. However, accompanied by Chitru Pindari and a troop of 500 men, Appa Saheb left Mahadeo Hills on 1st February 1819. Captain Jones was at Borda when he received this news, but in order to put him off by a wrong scent, it was given out that Appa Saheb was proceeding by way of Shahpur. Thus while Captain Jones and his regiment hastened in the direction of Shahpur to cut him off, Appa Saheb was safely on his way towards Sawligarh. Captain Jones soon realised his discomfiture, and having learned the correct whereabouts of the fugitives, he quickly turned round, and by forced marches came up against the troop that was accompanying Appa Saheb. Seeing the superior strength against them, the men realised that it was important to allow their leader time to get away safely as otherwise all would be lost. So they faced Captain Jones and engaged him in action while Appa Saheb with a small band of followers managed to get away.

It is rather difficult to trace exactly the movements of Appa Saheb after he left the Mahadeo Hills region. Very probably he moved towards Khandwa, because we hear of an incident near about Hivara on the road to Khandwa sometime early in February 1819. A strong contingent of the British army under Lt.-Col. Pollock intercepted Appa Saheb and his small band of men in this locality. The spot where the encounter took place was near a river which at that time was in high flood. It is reported that while the men of Appa Saheb engaged Pollock's soldiers for a time, Appa Saheb himself galloped towards the river and plunged into the flood on horse back, and swam across to safety. Unfortunately some of the followers of Appa Saheb were captured, among whom were a few of the loyal sepoys who, while doing sentry duty at the tent of Appa Saheb when he was being taken to Allahabad, had helped him in his escape. These men were tried by court-martial and executed, and thus became some of the first batch of brave men who gave up their lives for the country's independence.

There is reason to believe that the British authorities were fully convinced that Appa Saheb had proceeded from Khandwa towards Burhanpur and taken shelter in the strong and impregnable fort of Asirgarh. The fort of Asirgarh was then under the

Sindhia and was held on his behalf by Yashvantrao. Of all the fortresses that guarded the dominions of the Mughals, the fort of Asirgarh was perhaps the most impregnable. Malleeson describes it as

“a very famous fort lying 290 miles north-east of Bombay. It is built on an isolated hill, detached from the Satpura range, dividing the valley of the Tapti from that of the Nerbudda. It has a history which has sent its name through the length and breadth of India. Alike in the times of the Hindu, of the Mohammedan, and of the British overlordship, it has been considered a place worth fighting for.”

A large contingent of the British army, surrounded the fort and demanded its surrender. This they did in spite of the fact that Sindhia was at that time on friendly terms with the British authorities. It would appear that they were trying to find an excuse for capturing this important fortress, since it would give them a commanding position over the Deccan. The British army kept up the siege from the 16th of February till the 9th April 1819. During this time, the Qiledar of the fort, Yeshvantrao, had sent an emissary to them saying that Appa Saheb was not in the fort. When ultimately the fort was surrendered to the British, they realised that the person they were after was not there.

What had actually happened was that on 15th February 1819 Appa Saheb had gone from Dhulkot to Burhanpur where he secretly stayed in a private house. It was dangerous for him to move about in this area since the British army, in full strength, were stationed all round Asirgarh fort. Therefore, Appa Saheb left Burhanpur for Hundia in the disguise of a gosain. Crossing the river Narmada, he then entered the territory of Bhopal. It appears he tried to induce the Nawab to join him, but in this he was not successful. It was, however, generous of the Nawab not to have apprehended him and handed him over to the British authorities. His movements from here onwards appear to be confusing, but it seems clear that he approached the rulers Sindhia, Holkar and Jaipur for their support. There is also evidence that he was in communication with the Raja of Rewa. For a few days he took shelter with the Raja of Mundi. We learn from a letter from Calcutta to the Resident at Nagpur, which is dated 9th July 1824, that Appa Saheb was then in Lahore. The powerful ruler of Lahore at that time, Ranjit Singh, gave him shelter for a few days while he was attempting to gain strength among the rulers in that part of the country. The letter from Calcutta mentioned above also says that he was being financed from Nagpur and was carrying on recruitment in the Lahore territory.

It would appear that the efforts of Appa Saheb to form a confederated force to oppose the British did not prove successful. He ultimately proceeded to Jodhpur where he seems to have decided to live in seclusion. The Maharajah of Jodhpur received him with kindness, and strongly resisted the British inducements to hand the prisoner over to them. Appa Saheb took up his residence at Manmandir and seems to have devoted himself to religious studies. The popular esteem and respect which even then he enjoyed is evidenced by numerous writings of the period. One poem which was very popular at the time gives us an idea of the warm welcome which the Jodhpur Maharaja gave to this intrepid leader, who during all these years of trials and misfortune, undaunted by failures, passionately cherished the hope of regaining the independent Kingdom:

आये हो शरण जान मानकमधेशमोको,  
मानत हूँ धन्यधन्य ऐसो अवसर में।  
लोक बीच याही काज बाजत हैं क्षत्री हम,  
यातें अब सफल करेंगे भुजवर में।  
नागपुरनाथ जिन आपको अनाथ जान्यो,  
रावरे निमित्त कर दीनों सिरघर में।  
राखिहों सजल यों सुरेश सों बचाय कर,  
राख्यो हिमगिर पुत्र सिंधु जयों उदर में।

But the exile was not destined to fulfil his patriotic mission. On 15th July 1840, while still living under the hospitality of Jodhpur, Appa Saheb died there at the young age of 44 years.



## CHAPTER III

### NAGPUR UNDER TUTELAGE

The affairs in Nagpur following the deposition of Appa Sahab revealed the growing ascendancy of British influence in all spheres of administration. An infant prince, the grandson of Raghuji II, was placed on the throne to give to this policy of encroachment an appearance of justice and propriety. The Governor-General's Secretary wrote to the Resident on 18th June 1818, saying :

"You are apprised that the Governor-General contemplated elevating to the *masnad* of Nagpur the infant son of Nana Gujar by a daughter of the late Raja Raghoji Bhonsle. You will, therefore, proclaim the young prince Raja of Nagpur, and invite Baka Bai to exercise the office of guardian of the young Raja as a Regent of the State."

The prince was at that time about ten years of age. Baka Bai was the senior widow of the late Raghoji II and had been, in the time of Appa Sahab, strongly opposed to him. All those who had been on the side of Appa Sahab in the palace were eliminated, and Gujaba Dada whom he had forced to retire to Banaras, was called back and appointed to the office of Diwan.

But the Resident was convinced that all real power should be exercised by the British. Every department in the capital as well as in the interior was placed under the direct control of British officers. "It is now imperative", says Jenkins "that we should no longer rest on the merits of any native minister for the preservation of the State; and that the establishment of the new government on the principle of combining our own interests and reputation with the welfare of the minor prince and his subjects, could only be effected by taking into our hands, for a time at least, the direct administration of affairs" (Jenkins's *Supplementary Report*, p. 30). Since, in the opinion of the British, the so-called "welfare of the minor prince" was indistinguishable from the interest and reputation of the British themselves, there was no difficulty in setting up an administration for the single purpose of entrenching the British rule and preventing the possibility of another anti-British movement rising in the State. British officers were posted in charge of every department, including even the mint and the treasury. The army was placed exclusively under the British Government, the Raja being permitted to keep only a small retinue as an ornament "for the maintenance of his personal respectability."



At the time these changes were introduced they were represented as merely temporary arrangements. But it was obvious that positions of power once conferred cannot be easily withdrawn, especially when self-interest was better served by their retention. Thus, writing in 1825, Prinsep confesses that: "the difficulty of withdrawing has led to a continuance (of British administration) even to the present time. In fact, the entire administration has been, and is still conducted by the Resident and persons of his selection." (Prinsep's *Transactions*, Vol. II, p. 391).

The history of colonial expansion all the world over is full of instances in which the imperial power first captures positions of advantage, and then justifies its continuance on altruistic grounds. It is sometimes facetiously remarked that the British won their Empire in India in a fit of absent-mindedness. The fact, however, is that at the crucial moments of history, the British Empire-builders in India were anything but absent-minded. The Report submitted by the Resident, Mr. Jenkins, soon after the deposition of Appa Saheb, reveals a studied and carefully worked-out plan to bring the territories of Nagpur under British control. A gloomy picture is presented of the State as it stood under the deposed king, and the imperative need to impose British officers and others selected by the Resident is urged as the only way to establish peace and prosperity in the territories. It was considered expedient to introduce a new system of revenue assessment and collection, a British-controlled civil administration and a complete control of the army. Having thus occupied all key positions, the next step is to justify the continuance of this control. The public benevolence that is supposed to flow from this arrangement is the strongest reason why the control should not be withdrawn. In fact, it is argued that the people themselves would be averse to a return to the former state of affairs. And so, in the interest and for the lasting blessing of India's teeming millions, the British reluctantly have to remain, much against their wishes! Such is the logic of imperial rule. As Henry Prinsep puts it, with truly evangelical zeal :

"A population that has once been accustomed to an administration conducted on principle by British officers of integrity, acting for the public good, will never yield a ready obedience to the rapacious agents of a native despot ; and it is the height of tyranny to deliver them over, bound hand and foot, to become the victims of any vicious system that chance or caprice may substitute for that to which they have been accustomed." (Prinsep's *Transactions*, Vol. II, p. 393).

That was how the "White Man's Burden" accumulated: the idea of the foreign ruler as a saviour and redeemer, who found himself called upon to assume the burden of ruling over a nation so that they may be saved from the tyranny of their own independence! This process continued through several decades, deceiving none but the credulous, until the burden refused any longer to be borne upon the White Man's shoulders.

But that was much later. Meanwhile it would be interesting to examine the kind of administration which was introduced in the Nagpur territories, and which was supposed to possess excellent virtues. The basis of the administration was the treaty which the Resident had prepared for the acceptance of the Raja after it was approved by the Governor-General. Under this treaty all the powers of the Raja, both in internal and external affairs, were taken over by the British, who would nominally exercise them in the Raja's name in that part of his territory reserved for him. It was clearly provided that the Raja "shall pay at all times the utmost attention to the advice of the British Government on all subjects connected with His Highness's interests, the happiness of the people and the mutual welfare of both states, and shall conduct the affairs of his government by the hands of ministers and other officers in the confidence of the British Government". The army was to be always under the direct control of the British officers. The treaty also provided for the eventual resumption of the management of the country in the event of bad government on the Raja's part. It was on terms such as these that the Resident proposed the transfer of the administration to the Raja after the expiry of his minority. But the transfer would be only of such portion of the territory as they considered within the ability of the Raja to govern. The rest would continue to be governed by the British, in the manner in which the whole territory was administered by them during the minority.

For the purpose of management, the Resident divided the territory into three divisions, Deogarh, Chanda and Chhattisgarh, and appointed, in each of them, a British officer with the designation of Collector, which was subsequently changed to Superintendent. Later on, Deogarh above the ghats was formed into a separate jurisdiction under a Superintendent, and Deogarh below the ghats was further divided into two divisions, namely, Nagpur and Wainganga districts.

The collection of revenue was to be made by petty Indian officers appointed by the Superintendents, on a fixed salary. Fresh assessments were made in terms of money, and the existing

cultivators were allowed to plough their lands on payment of the newly-assessed revenue. It will be pointed out later how the village administration introduced by the British had the effect of uprooting the ancient village institutions and destroying the village economy. For the present, it is enough to say that the cumulative effect of all the changes that were introduced by the British was to impoverish the people, and create disaffection in their minds. This is borne out by the views of some of the outstanding Englishmen who administered these areas, and had intimate knowledge of the people and their minds. Sir John Malcolm who held high office in Central India and U. P., and to whom the Peshwa had surrendered in 1818, says:

"The change to a colder system of policy, and the introduction of our laws and regulations into countries immediately dependent upon us, naturally excite agitation and alarm. Disgust and discontent succeed to terror and admiration; and the princes, the chiefs and all who had enjoyed rank or influence, see nothing but a system dooming them to immediate decline and ultimate annihilation." (Sir John Malcolm: *A Memoir of Central India*, Vol. II).

The effect of the large-scale incursion of British influence and British personnel in all positions of control in the administration, was to create among the people, particularly among those who had formerly wielded power in these territories, a sense of sullen frustration which demoralised them. The superior conquerors displaced the local people all along the line, and consigned them to the meanest jobs. The famous Minute that Sir Thomas Munro sent to Lord Hastings in 1817, though immediately based on his experience in Madras State, applies with equal force to the condition of the people in all parts of the country where British men displaced local dignitaries. "Foreign conquerors have treated the natives with violence, and often with great cruelty but none has treated them with so much scorn as we; none has stigmatized the whole people as unworthy of trust, as incapable of honesty, and as fit to be employed only where we cannot do without them. It seems to be not only ungenerous but impolitic, to debase the character of a people fallen under our dominion." Sir Thomas Munro was one of those rare British administrators who came to this country with a broad and liberal background, and succeeded in not losing it amidst the selfishness and greed that were rank in the British community in India. He could, therefore, frankly confess that "there is perhaps no example of any conquest in which the natives have been so completely excluded from all share of

the government of their country as in British India." (Thompson and Garrett, p. 658).

Wherever British influence spread and settled, it ate into the fabric of public life, and stifled the human spirit. Among the foreign personnel who manned all the important posts in the country, there were many who were mere adventurers, whose only interest was to amass a private fortune, heedless of the people's welfare as well as of the professed policy of the British Government. What is said of the neighbouring State of Hyderabad under the British, was equally true of the Nagpur Territory when the British began ruling it. "Nothing seemed to flourish there except corruption . . . the wretched people were dragooned into submission, and the required payment extorted from them, at the bayonet's point or the sabre's edge." (Kaye's *Life of Metcalfe*, Vol. II).

In soil such as this, the seeds of revolt readily germinate. Not unlike this was the general state of the Bhonsla Territory during the years that the minor king served as a figure-head and excuse for the spread and consolidation of foreign power in all parts of it. When in 1830 Raghoji III attained his majority, the situation had become almost irretrievable, and the Resident's administration had been too deeply entrenched for any change to be introduced, granting that the young king had the will and the ability to do it—which was by no means the case. Of this we shall see more later.



## CHAPTER IV

### SAGAR-NARMADA TERRITORIES

One of the obvious historical facts which most of the English historians could not, or would not take notice of, is that India, prior to the arrival of the British, was in a flourishing and prosperous condition. It is customary for books on Indian history, written mostly by foreigners, to describe the condition that existed in India when the English merchants arrived, as one of confusion, distress and poverty, from which, it is made to appear, the benevolence of English interference redeemed them. Among the few contemporary writers who did see the facts more clearly and record them fearlessly, is Major Evans Bell, who was for some time Assistant Agent to the Governor-General in Nagpur Territory after the British had taken possession of it. In his "*Memoirs of General Briggs*", he refers to the false and fantastic notions which were prevalent concerning the condition of the country under its native princes. The English rulers of India conceive of that condition as one of such extreme misery and oppression that any change could hardly fail to be a change for the better, while a change which substituted British rule for what they summarily describe as oriental despotism must be equivalent to a translation from darkness to light. "This condition of wretchedness is never demonstrated. It is assumed to be like a mathematical axiom which requires only to be stated in order to command acquiescence. And yet even upon the surface of things, there is much which would seem to render this assertion, so confidently and constantly made, a highly questionable one. It was not the wretchedness and poverty of India which first attracted European adventurers thither. It was on the contrary, as they themselves describe, its wealth, the magnificence of its princes, the high level of civilization and prosperity to which its people had attained. And even in these days it is impossible for the least observant traveller to journey through India without meeting in all parts of the country the indications of a grandeur and an opulence that have only recently decayed. The most convincing proof of the general order and security prevailing in India under the native princes is to be seen in the irrigation tanks, the mango groves, the wells, caravanserais, mosques and temples—now too often in ruins—which meet the eye so frequently in almost every province. These—and they must formerly have been more numerous—were nearly all the creation of private liberality. They demonstrate also the wealth and public spirit of the people, and are not less important in passing judgement upon the safety with which the evidence of wealth could be openly displayed.

"In 1829, Colonel Sleeman caused an estimate to be made of the public works of ornament and utility which in a single district of Jabalpur—now included in the Central Provinces—were due to the munificence of private persons anterior to the British rule. 'The population of the district amounted to about half a million, and there were, in various parts of town and country, created by individuals for the public good, and with no view to personal return or profits, 2,286 tanks, 209 large wells with flights of steps extending from the top down to the water in its lowest stages, 1,560 wells lined with masonry but without stairs, 369 Hindu temples and 92 mosques. The estimated cost of these works amounted to £866,640. In addition to these, two-thirds of the towns and villages were embedded in groves of mango and tamarind trees mixed with the banyan and peepal, all planted at the cost of private citizens at an estimated cost of £12,000.'

"Extracts of a similar purport might be multiplied indefinitely, and show beyond all possibility of dispute that India under the native princes was possessed of wealth and abundance of goods, that her upper classes were remarkable for their liberality and public spirit, and that the industrial and lower classes were in a thriving condition. What is the explanation of all this—so contrary to the common legend, officially propagated, of disorder and misery from which we were divinely commissioned to rescue the wretched Hindu? It would be absurd to ascribe the prosperity of India to the character of her kings and princes, reigning at Delhi or elsewhere. Great kings, it is true, are to be found among them, but extremely bad ones in far greater numbers. But, after all,—

'Of all the ills that human hearts endure,

How small the part that kings can cause or cure.'

"It is not in the character of the kings and princes of India, but in that of the constitutional order at the head of which they were placed, that we must look for the explanation." The events that occurred in the Sagar-Narmada territories, after the British took possession of, is a fair illustration of this fact.

The districts of Sagar and Damoh had been bequeathed by Raja Chhatrasal of Bundelkhand to the Peshwa, and after the deposition of the Peshwa by Lord Hastings, these districts were ceded to the British in 1817 under the Treaty of Poona. But it was not till March 1818 that this part of the country was actually occupied by the British, and even then only after they had overcome the resistance offered by Vinayak Rao who administered the Sagar kingdom on behalf of the widow of its occupant under the Peshwa.

General Marshall took possession of Sagar and its dependencies, and proceeded to occupy the districts ceded by Appa Saheb after his defeat in the Battle of Sitabaldi. These were the districts of Mandla, Betul, Seoni and the Narmada valley. Resistance was offered by the Qiledar of Mandla who had received private orders of Appa Saheb not to deliver up the place. But General Marshall, reinforced by forces from Jabalpur, besieged the fortress and battered the walls, so that the next morning the fort surrendered.

These territories, partly obtained from the Peshwa and partly from the Nagpur kingdom, were formed into what was called the Sagar-Narmada Territory in 1820, and placed under an Agent to the Governor-General. The country was interspersed by hills and valleys, largely covered by jungles, except in the uplands of Sagar and in the valleys of Narsimhapur, Hoshangabad and Jabalpur. The tract possessed natural fertility and great productive capabilities which, under proper management, could be made to yield rich results. But under British administration the result, perhaps inevitably, was to impoverish the land and create a large and influential class of dispossessed persons who bore a grudge against the foreign rulers and would, therefore, willingly lend their ears to any scheme calculated to subvert authority.

It would be useful to examine briefly the consequences that generally flowed from the establishment of British control over Indian territories. The conquest of our country by the British differed from that by the previous invaders in one vital feature. The military adventurer and warlord, whether from Afghanistan or Persia, invaded the country, established his supremacy in certain parts of it, brought with him his court and culture, but he refrained from any attempt to upset or modify the immemorial institutions in the country which he governed, the social and economic life of the people. The structure and constitution of society remained, by and large, unaffected by the dynastic changes that took place in the country. Like the supple trees in their vast jungles, the people bowed before the raging storm and let it pass, and still remained unbroken.

Not so the conquest by the British. In province after province the same story of complete disruption of economy and social structure followed in the wake of their occupation. "A number of English officers, charged to overflowing with self-complacent philanthropy and natural confidence, are let loose upon the devoted region. They set to work under the impression, excited and slightly justified by recent revolution or war, that the material to be operated on is a population quite without social or political



form, and void of anything like order, and upon which, consequently, they can impress any shape that is most pleasing to themselves. They are the potter and the people are to be as clay in their hands." (Major Bell: *Memoirs of General Briggs*.)

One of the first casualties in this process is the old village economy, and its revenue. From ancient times the economy was based on the produce of the land. For all purposes of Government record, every village was embodied in its harvest for the year. This was the chief source of revenue. Government's share was calculated on a ratio of this harvest, and was collected in kind, not in cash. The grain was the medium of exchange in the village, the currency with which payments were made to the village priest, or *chamar* or *lohar*. The system of village self-government gave to the whole social structure a firm foundation based on mutual obligation and trust. As long as the State got its share of the produce from the village, it was content to leave the allocation of each villager's share to the Village Panchayat themselves. One of the consequences of this system was that the people rarely fell into arrears of revenue, and the State was saved from all the protracted legal processes of collection and the intricacies of land tenures.

But when the foreign power took possession of a province, all this was at once changed. "Our first act in a newly acquired district was to decree that the land revenue should henceforth be paid in coin, without having previously ascertained if there was sufficient coin in circulation to allow of such a sudden and drastic change. . . . A pressing demand for specie glutted the markets with an immense quantity of produce which had to be sold for whatever it would bring." (*Ibid.*) One can well imagine the impact of this change on the cultivators. The value of their produce in terms of money at once fell.\* It was not possible for them to pay their full revenue and meet their own requirements. They invariably fell into arrears—which formerly was unheard of—and the result was that they were proceeded against in a weary process of civil suit. It became necessary to keep elaborate records of tenures and rights which were made transferable. All these records had to be kept in charge of a servant who invariably became a petty official of the Government. Thus, instead of conferring any right on the cultivator, the British administration had the effect of making the cultivator a helpless victim of a miserably paid village official, the keeper of the records, who generally made up

\* "The ryot was forced to dispose of part of his produce to meet a cash demand and had only one channel through which to sell. He had to think of wealth in terms of money instead of as cattle or grain; money was a medium of which he knew little".

(Thompson and Garrat: *British Rule in India*, p, 428).

for his poor salary by all kinds of corruption and imposture. The revenue assessment in the Sagar-Narmada Territory had been particularly heavy. R. M. Bird, Member of the Sadar Board of Revenue, North-Western Provinces, who toured the Sagar-Narmada Territory in 1834, has recorded that "the nominal demand is too high for the present condition of the territory. . . . The reduction of the present high nominal *jamma* to an amount which can, on an average of years, be collected is an indispensable preliminary to the introduction of a successful system of administration" ("Note on Sagar-Narmada Territory" by R. M. Bird). It was, therefore, obvious that the owners of land would be forced into distress, and if the course of law were relentlessly pursued, must be dispossessed. Indeed this was what happened to numerous Taluqdars, Thakurs and Zamindars in this area during the first decade and more of British rule.

Along with the uprooting of the economy of the village, the social and political set-up of the village was also destroyed. The Indian village had always formed a kind of petty republic, self-contained and self-governed by the Panchayat and the headman, most of whom, though hereditary, could be set aside by popular decision in favour of a more acceptable member of the family concerned. Not only agricultural classes, but other professional groups, the traders, the smiths and other producers, and the banking class, were all knit together into self-regulating bodies, which, through their joint decisions and control, enforced standards of conduct and acceptance of justice more effectively than any court of law. These institutions gave to the villages a stability and order which were able to withstand the periodic invasions and conquests that swept through the country.

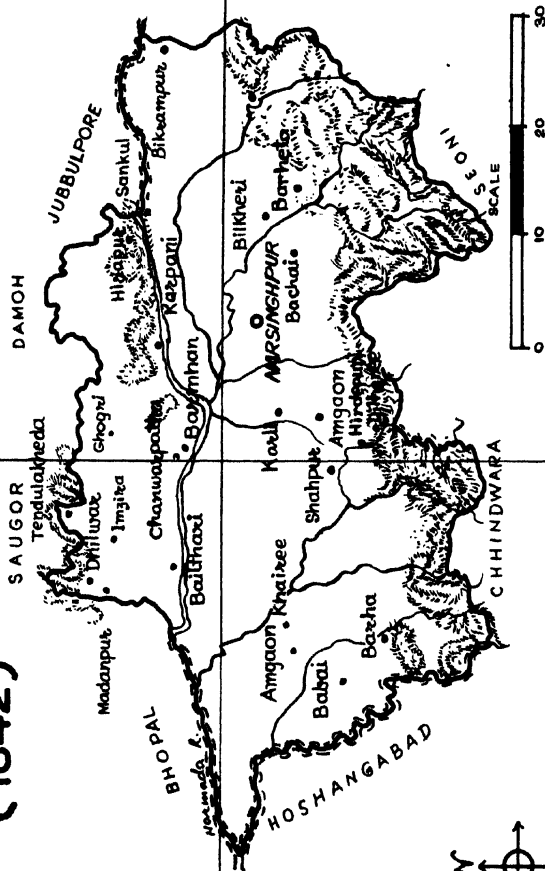
What the British did not, or could not understand was that the foundations of the people's lives in our country were thousands of years older, and therefore stronger, than anything they had known. They did not realise that these were the product of the genius and character of the people, possessing the resilience and adaptability of natural growth. To the British, convinced of their superior civilization, all this appeared primitive and barbarous. What they could not understand, they considered contemptible. Therefore, they proceeded to sweep aside what they felt were the vestiges of an uncivilized world, and sought to substitute in their place an economy and administrative structure quite alien to the spirit of the people. Thus began a silent but determined conflict between the indigenous and enduring social order and the alien administrative system, which could never be reconciled. Now and then

this conflict erupted into violent outbreak and resulted in widespread loss of life and property. Superior force, supported by the might of a nation thousands of miles away, succeeded in putting down such outbreaks every time at an increasing cost. But, though the eruption was, for a time, subdued, the smouldering fires burnt in undying embers, and burst into flames whenever circumstances provided combustible material. Not until the incubus was finally and completely overthrown did the fire subside—but that was to take a hundred years.

Meanwhile the first eruption, caused by the political, economic and social unsettlement described above, took place among the dispossessed landlords and chieftains of Sagar-Narmada Territory,—which is known as Bundela Rising.



# NARSINGPUR REGION (1842)



## CHAPTER V

### BUNDELA RISING, 1842

The owners of land in the Sagar-Narmada Territories belonged mainly to the Gond, Lodhi and Bundela Rajput clans. They were petty Chiefs, Thakurs and Zamindars who had been accustomed to a considerable amount of freedom under the Peshwas, provided they paid the annual revenues assessed on them. The cession of these territories to the British by the Peshwa and the Raja of Nagpur led to a period of military action by the British army before they could occupy them. Resistance was kept up at several important fortresses such as Damoh, Sagar and Mandla. But by 1819, most of the districts had been subjugated, and in 1820, as stated earlier, the Sagar-Narmada Territories were formed and placed under the control of an Agent to the Governor-General. The process of settlement of these districts was accompanied by large-scale dispossession of long-standing malguzars, some of whom were suspected of hostile intent, while some others had defaulted in their payments. Against those who had fallen in arrears legal action was taken and, after much harassment, were deprived of their lands and property.

Two influential Bundela Thakurs in the north Sagar, Jawahar Singh Bundela of Chandrapur, and Madhukar Shah of Narhut were served with decrees of the Civil Court of Sagar early in 1842, and were threatened with attachment of property. Their answer to it was to defy the order, attack the police, some of whom they killed, and rise in open rebellion against the Government. They were joined by a large number of discontented landlords and Gond leaders in the region north of the Narmada. The seething elements of opposition and revolt which had so far remained suppressed were set free by this open resistance which served as a rallying point. The uprising was most successful in Narsimhapur district. Practically every landlord of the Chawarpatha pargana joined the rebels, either openly or covertly. The leader of the revolt in this district was Rajah Dilhan Shah, the Gond Chief of Madanpur. He was joined by several malguzars, and they captured Deori and the entire Chawarpatha tract.

The timing of this revolt was admirably chosen. The British army had only recently suffered from a most disastrous campaign in Afghanistan. "Of the 16,500 men that had started from Kabul a week before, all were destroyed excepting 120 prisoners under Akbar Khan, and only one, Dr. Brydon, reached Jalalabad, to narrate the painful story of the tragic retreat." (Muzumdar and

Ray Chaudhary: *An Advanced History of India*, p. 757). It was this depleted state of the British army that led the Bundela leaders to believe that the time was opportune for a rising. "They were impressed with a conviction that it was in their power to assert independence, and the exaggerated accounts of our Kabul disasters and the extremely reduced state of the military forces in the Division led them to think that the Government could not coerce them." (Captain Boland's letter to the Agent to the Lieutenant-Governor, Sagar and Narmada Territory, dated 5th January 1843.)

Captain W. H. Boland who was the Principal Assistant at Hoshangabad, in his report to the Agent at Sagar, quotes the statement of one Chunilal of Chawarpatha who was a witness to the capture of the Chawarpatha fort. The insurgents then proceeded to Berhman where they fired on the Naib-Tahsildar who was on the opposite bank of the river. They took possession of this place, and offered presents and prayers to the fort deities, and fed the Brahmins. They appointed one of the local leaders, Trimbak Rao, the Amil of Chawarpatha and Berhman, and then proceeded to Soothulla where the Bundela Chief, Thakur Ranjit Singh, joined them. From there the insurgents made their way through Jherra Ghat towards Maharajpur which they took.

It was remarkable how the revolt spread like a forest fire enveloping the entire region. This simultaneous outbreak at a number of places spread over a vast area made it impossible for the British, with their much reduced strength, to meet the insurgents with adequate force. The Bundelas in the meanwhile decided to consolidate their position. They posted their men at all the important ghats of the Narmada that gave access to their territory. "Beltharee Ghat was consigned to Chiman's protection, Baria Ghat to Brijbhukan Jamadar, Sagore Ghat to Khet Singh, malguzar of Soothulla, Kirpani Ghat to Rao Mahukam Singh. The Jheera Ghat was made over to the Soothulla men. They were to prevent the passage of any servants of Government, and the boats were all swamped." (Captain Boland's letter.) They also proceeded to appoint their own patwari, nazir, serishtadar in the captured area, who were all allowed their villages free of rent on condition that they fought faithfully against the British.

For a time the British were unable to understand the real cause of this widespread and successful revolt. Writing in April 1842, the Secretary to the Governor-General says :

"It is probable, they (the Bundelas) have been excited by the arrest, during the past and preceding year, of a number of their relatives for acts of rebellion committed in Scindia's Territory."

The truth is that the malady was far more deep-seated. The rugged and independent chieftains of this area had never really got reconciled to the British rule. As already pointed out, the land and legal administration which came with the British rule further roused the people. It is significant that this area was precisely the portion of Central Provinces that played a prominent part later during the 1857 movement.

The spirit of revolt spread rapidly. With Narsimhapur and Sagar up in arms, the next to rise was Jabalpur. The Junior Assistant at this town writes in April 1842: "the consternation to be naturally expected as the result of this successful inroad (by the insurgents) is spreading throughout these territories on account of the eruption reaching the ears of the people; and the alarm at Jabalpur has been so great as to render it necessary to postpone the departure to Sagar, until confidence in the public of Jabalpur is restored. . . Instructions have been sent to District Officers at Hoshangabad, Seoni, Betul and Damoh to increase their police, and I propose to superintend the execution of the orders, as far as possible, in person." The leading spirit of the Jabalpur revolt was Raja Hirde Shah of Heerapur who had been in correspondence for some time with the other Thakurs, sounding them about a joint rising against the British. Captain Brown writing to Major Sleeman explains how from the intercepted letters he had come to know that the time fixed for the outbreak was the Dussera festival: "As in former times it was usual for all persons of rank to assemble at this season at the residence of the chief local authority, advantage was taken of the custom to invite the suspected parties to visit me at Jabalpur. Some came, others did not; and amongst the latter was Raja Hirde Shah". (Letter from Captain C. Brown to Major Sleeman, dated 20th November 1842.)

It was soon after this that the followers of the Raja led by Gajraj Singh attacked the police post of Gujpura. The Jabalpur detachment thereupon advanced towards Hirapur, but were delayed owing to the difficulty in crossing the Narmada. When they ultimately reached Heerapur, they found that the Raja had fallen back on Tejgarh. His intention appeared to be to march towards Chawarpatha so as to effect a junction with the forces under the Thakur of Maddanpur. The British officers found it extremely difficult to track down and tackle these insurgent leaders, because they could not get any reliable information about them. Captain Boland, rather ruefully admits "I have been disappointed in my expectation that the malguzars who attended me would cause the surrender of the rebels still in arms against us; and I regret to state that some of them while professing the strongest fidelity to Govern-



ment were affording supplies and protection to the insurgents." He mentions how one Thakur Mardan Singh who was asked to act as a guide to the British forces in their attack on the rebels at Peeparwani, deliberately misled the police, and secretly sent word to the insurgents to keep out of the way. Another landlord, Sukhlal Tiwari of Pendra, gave shelter and protection to the rebels while on their way from Madanpur to Heerapur, while all the time acting as an adviser to the British. It is obvious that the success of the Bundela insurgents was largely due to the support which they received from the people of the area. "The progress of the insurgents was open. They moved in a mass in broad day light and were unmolested by the large and powerful Taluqdars through whose lands they passed, and in the vicinity of whose towns they encamped. . . . They have plundered little or nothing and must consequently have been supplied by the Rajas." (Captain Boland's letter.) It is because of the people's support that Raja Hirde Shah when attacked by Captain C. Brown was able to make his way across the river, encamp at Budhgaon and Bachia. He then passed through the territory of the Raja of Dilheri to Chaugaon, a place near the fort of Chauragarh.

Observing the movements of Raja Hirde Shah, General Tombs ordered Colonel Watson to Tejgarh. Hirde Shah had, in the meanwhile, doubled back with the intention of getting into Bundelkhand, and on his way a British detachment fell upon him, not far from Tejgarh. Although Raja Hirde Shah escaped, several of his party were captured or killed, and some property was also seized. Hirde Shah made his way to Jaitpur where he effected a junction with the ex-Raja of that place. The successes achieved by the chieftains, both in capturing important forts and villages and in effectively escaping the pursuing British who appeared to be checkmated every time, resulted in the temporary elimination of foreign power from a large part of the trans-Narmada portion of Narsimbhapur, Sagar and Jabalpur. The ranks of the insurgents increased. The audacity and quickness of their movements which were reminiscent of the army of Shivaji, rendered the British almost helpless. Hirde Shah and his men successfully evaded Colonel Watson, and went back to Heerapur which they recaptured, driving away the police, who had been left there for its protection, with much loss of life. (File No. 783/1842.)

The capture of Tendukhera by the Thakur of Madanpur was even more encouraging. This village in Hoshangabad district occupied a strategic position. It had been used by Captain Wakeman only a few weeks before for camping his detachment. Dilhan Shah, Thakur of Madanpur, who, as we have already seen,

had fortified Chawarpatha, now advanced with a large body of men towards this village. The Tahsildar at Narsimhapur was instructed to check this advance and protect the village by meeting them with all the available force. But when the Tahsildar saw the number and strength of the insurgents, he precipitately fled from there, and the force at his command followed his gallant example ! Thus Tendukhera was captured without a shot being fired.

Till practically the end of 1842 the desultory fighting between the insurgent chieftains and the British forces was kept up at a number of places. None of these engagements was of a decisive nature, because the Bundelas kept up a guerilla warfare in the mountains and jungles of their country. They could never be effectively wiped out, nor could they be captured. The wild countryside of Bundelkhand and the Narmada valley provided them with excellent places of refuge whenever they were overpowered by superior force.

Partly for this reason, and partly from an awareness of their own depleted position after the disasters of the retreat from Kabul, the British were inclined to come to terms with the insurgents. Captain Boland writing from Hoshangabad to the Agent at Sagar suggests a prudent way of settling the trouble : "As it would be impossible and impolitic to punish so large a body of influential people, I would suggest that the principal Jagirdars, Taluqdars and Gond Rajas be summoned in and promised forgiveness for the past, if they take an active part against the insurgents. Until some such measure be adopted, I anticipate no decided results and an indefinite prolongation of the existing state of disturbance." (Letter, dated 5th January 1843.)

Some success had, in the meanwhile, come to the British, though not wholly by their own valour. On 17th November 1842, they had issued a proclamation calling upon all the chieftains to lay down arms. The Proclamation read :

"Whereas the Raja Hirde Shah had been foolish enough to follow the example of the insurgents and plunderers, and whereas the said Raja having opposed the Government troops has fled, the Agent to the Lieutenant-Governor is desirous of his apprehension.

"But in order to comfort and assure all land-holders, possessors of estates and property, this proclamation is issued to impress upon all, that the British Government is not desirous of punishing any but the leaders of the insurgents. Therefore, all those who may have been induced to do so through intimidation or ignorance, or inability to resist them are called

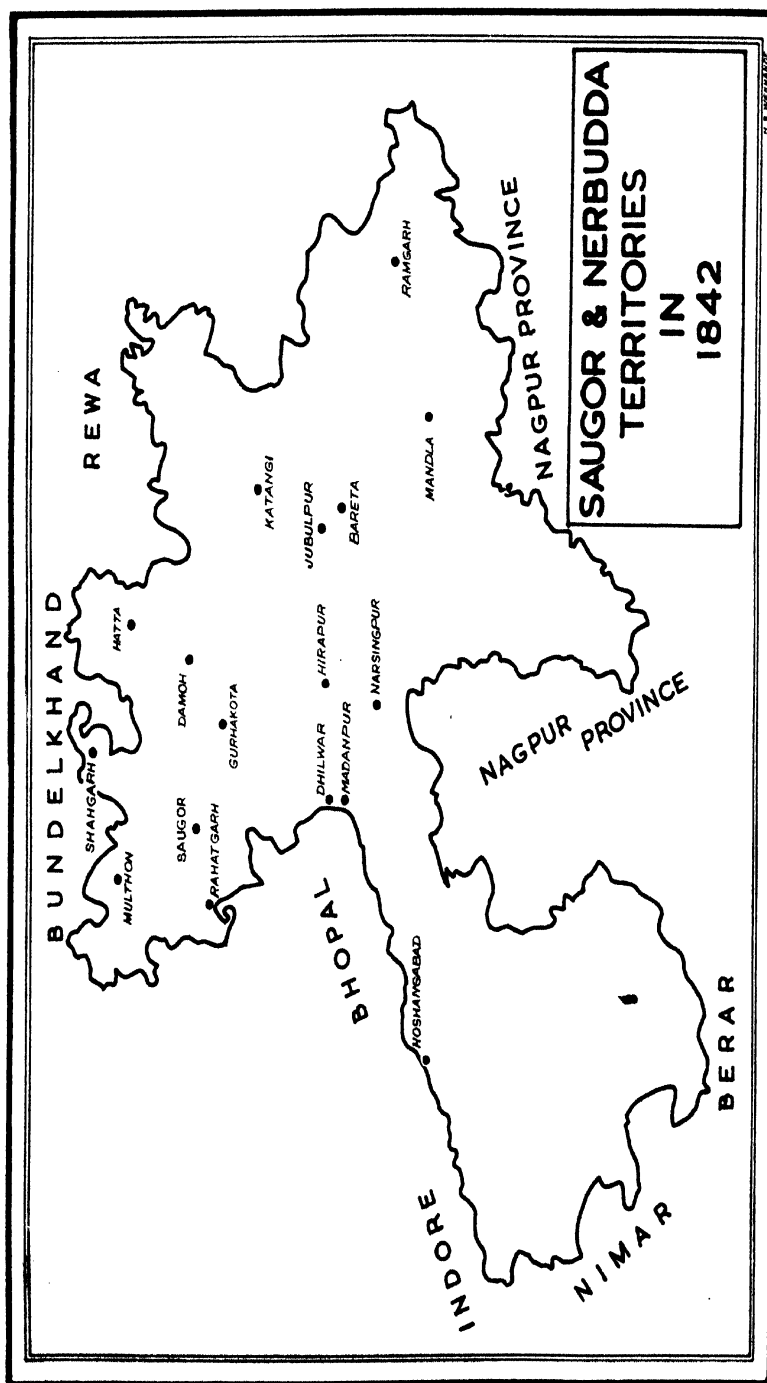
upon to dismiss their fears, and are invited to wait upon either the District Officer or the Agent and explain their reasons for having joined the insurgents. The Agent may himself enquire minutely into their cases and guarantee their lives. All persons who may have any plundered property in their possession are requested to bring it to the Agent as the best proof of their innocence. The Agent is bent on the apprehension and punishment of the ring-leaders only."

One of the results of this proclamation was that Colonel Ely who was pursuing the Raja of Heerapur towards Pathan was able to report that "with the help of the Raja of Shahgarh they had been able to capture Raja Hirde Shah of Heerapur and his whole family on the 22nd December 1842". The capture of Hirde Shah and his party was a major set-back for the insurgents. The prisoners were sent to Chunar *via* Damoh under a strong police escort, and were then sent to the Jabalpur jail. Some indication of the anxiety which the British authorities had regarding the influence which Raja Hirde Shah exercised over the minds of the people in these territories, is provided by the fact that while they were conducting him and his family under a strong police guard from Tejgarh to Jabalpur, Major Sleeman, Agent to Governor-General in Bundelkhand, wrote to Captain Brown, informing him that while Hirde Shah and the other persons were being taken through the town of Damoh, the people of the town, who knew him, should be asked to confront him, so that there may be no doubt among the people about the capture of their leaders. It was their hope that, following on the arrest of Hirde Shah and his men, the other leaders of the rebels would surrender, one by one.

Captain Boland had suggested, "should they after this warning still persist in their present course of aiding the rebels, I would strongly suggest a severe example being made of some influential man". Perhaps it was with this motive that when Captain Wakeman captured Madhukar Shah of Narhut, he was publicly executed, and his body burnt behind the Sagar jail. Madhukar Shah, however, became a popular hero, and the subject of folk-songs and folk-lore which are widely current in this area. At the place where his body was cremated, a *chabutra* has been raised and the people who live in Gopalganj still look upon this monument with great reverence.

By April 1843 the disturbance was practically suppressed. No doubt, when the Gwalior Durbar commenced their hostilities in this year against the British, some of the chiefs of Sagar-Narmada Territory, who had long historic ties with Sindhia, also broke out in sympathetic rebellion. But this was soon suppressed.

Thus this remarkable attempt to overthrow the British power in the Sagar-Narmada Territory, which at one time appeared almost within reach of a successful conclusion, collapsed after a period of 18 months. The reasons for the failure of this movement are obvious. The different Bundela chieftains who rose up against the British chose to act independently and in isolation. Although it is obvious that these leaders had at least the passive support of the people, and they chose for their attack only the seats of foreign power, like the Government offices and the police thanas, the movement failed to gather any momentum because there was no co-ordinated plan and an over-all leadership among the insurgents. If, in 1842, the Bundelas had been able to find a leader of dominating influence and genius, such as Raja Chhatrasal, it would have been possible for this movement to have developed into a major offensive, and served as a spear-head for a liberation campaign. But as it turned out, they were acting in separate groups with no pre-arranged design of a campaign, and were opposed by the well-equipped and ably-led British army who, when the first shock of surprise was overcome, were able to round them up in isolated groups, and thus suppress the revolt effectively. Yet, in the story of India's attempts to throw off the foreign rule, this episode of resistance by the Bundela chieftains occupies an important place.



## CHAPTER VI

### ANNEXATION OF NAGPUR

While the abortive attempt of the Bundela chieftains to assert their independence was engaging the attention of the British authorities in the northern districts of the Sagar-Narmada Territory, events in Nagpur were also imperceptibly moving towards a decisive end. The subsidiary forces of the Raja of Nagpur gave loyal assistance to the British troops in putting down the Bundela rising.

Raja Raghuji III, who attained his majority in 1830, assumed the powers of ruler, although he was bound by treaties to act always with the advice of the Resident. At first the Resident was inclined to view with considerable satisfaction the interest and ability displayed by the Raja in administering his territories. He reported to the Governor-General that the Raja had given up the habits of indolence and inattention and was applying himself in earnest to the management of public affairs.

One of the first consequences of the interest that the Raja began to take in public affairs was his growing conviction, that the tribute which he was required to pay to the British was excessive and unjustified. From 1840 onwards, on every possible occasion, the Rajah impressed upon the Resident the need to revise the amount of the tribute that he was annually required to pay. The response of the Governor-General to these importunate demands was characteristic. While complimenting the Raja, in most favourable terms, for his great interest in public affairs, he was at the same time firmly and irrevocably told that there would be no reduction in the 8 lakhs of annual tribute. Lord Auckland, who was then Governor-General, writes to the Raja of Nagpur:

"I have considered your Highness's request with respect to the remission of 8 lakhs of rupees with much attention, and do not think that a case has been made out, which would justify me in recommending to the Home authorities a sacrifice of any portion of the tribute received from your Highness. I cannot refrain from remarking that the proportion which the tribute of Nagpur bears to the entire resources of that State, is very moderate as compared with that which is exacted from most of the other tributary States of India. These, Your Highness is not unaware, have been called upon to contribute to the general resources of the Empire a third and a fourth of their annual revenues. The demand on your Highness is, at the present time, a little more than 1/6th of your yearly income."

As if to reinforce this reply of the Governor-General, the Rajah was also given a copy of the despatch from the Court of Directors in London, in which the refusal to reduce or remit the tribute was repeated.

The natural disappointment which the Raja felt at this attitude of the Governor-General, led to a steady increase of misunderstanding, and a deterioration in the relationship between him and the Resident. The change in the office of the Resident at this time, as a result of the departure of Major Wilkinson and the arrival of Captain Ramsay, did not help in improving the situation. Complaints began to be made by the Resident about the Raja's extravagance in expenditure and laxity of administration. The Resident repeatedly asked Raghoji to reduce his expenditure so as to bring it well below the revenue, and to appoint honest and able men in responsible situations instead of those who only pay the highest *nazar*. These admonitions, partly because of their tone and partly due to the context in which they were made, had little effect on the Raja. Therefore, on 29th July 1848, Lord Dalhousie, who was then the Governor-General, addressed the Raja of Nagpur in his characteristic pompous manner :

"Having heard an unfavourable account of the manner in which Your Highness's country is at present administered, I desired Captain Ramsay, the acting Resident at Your Highness's Court, to take an opportunity of warning Your Highness of the disastrous consequences which must ensue to you unless you immediately apply your attention, and use your best endeavours to the removal of abuses and the reduction of expenditure.

"It is needless to tell Your Highness that no government can long exist in which the expenses constantly exceed the revenues, and debt is incurred without the means of liquidating it. Your expenditure considerably exceeds your revenue, and you have a debt to discharge exceeding Rs. 34 lakhs. From whence will you create the funds out of which this debt has to be liquidated ?

"I am told that Your Highness frequently expresses a hope that the British Government will remit the tribute which Your Highness is bound to pay under treaty. It is proper that I should inform you, once for all, that such a hope is utterly vain. The British Government will never consent to relinquish what is theirs by treaty. Cast from your mind, therefore, any such thought which it is mere childishness to entertain."

This letter has been quoted at some length to show the pontifical and dictatorial manner which Dalhousie, the author of the Doctrine of Lapse, adopted towards the ruling princes of this country. It would be interesting to know that the debt of which he speaks in the letter, does not refer to any money borrowed by the Raja, but refers to the expenses involved to the British for conquering the kingdom of Nagpur. In other words, the Raja of Nagpur must pay for the pleasure of being conquered by the British.

It is also relevant to point out that the treaty to which a reference is made by Lord Dalhousie, is the treaty as modified in 1826, and later in 1829 when Raghujii III was a minor. Clearly these treaties expressed, as Dalhousie himself confesses, "nothing but the will of a superior imposing on his vassal so much as, for the time, it was thought expedient to require." Under Article 10 of the 1826 treaty, His Highness promised to pay at all times the utmost attention to the advice offered by the British Government, and stipulated that the Raja's ministers should be responsible to the British Government as well as to His Highness, in the exercise of their duties. The treaty of 1829 was even more comprehensive, since it provided that "It should be competent to the British Government, through its legal representatives, to offer advice to the Raja, his heirs and successors on all important matters, whether relating to the internal administration of the Nagpur territory, or to external concerns, *and His Highness shall be bound to act in conformity thereto*". It will be seen that the effect of the treaty was thus to bind the Raja of Nagpur, hand and foot, to unquestioning obedience to the advice of the Resident and, in fact, to reduce him into a mere figure-head.

It was obvious that a relationship of this kind, with overbearing dictation on the one hand and resentful submission on the other, would not last long. From a situation so galling and dishonourable to him, Raghujii III found his escape by his death, on the morning of 11th December 1853. He seemed to have suffered from piles which grew worse under the most indifferent medical treatment. Though his death was to him an escape from an intolerable situation, it brought on the State of Nagpur an immediate crisis because he had left no heir to succeed to the throne.

The available correspondence and records for the period between the assumption of ruling powers by the Rajah of Nagpur and his death in 1853, clearly show that the annexation of the State of Nagpur had been decided upon in the minds of the British rulers long before the event took place. They had also clearly made up



their minds to disallow the adoption of an heir by the widow of the Raja. In his despatch, dated 8th February 1837, Cavendish, the Resident, Nagpur, argues:

"In my opinion, adoption should not be allowed ; for, the British Government conquered this country and gave it to His Highness and His sons, and on his death without an heir-apparent or posthumous child, it should escheat or lapse to our Government."

This view was not, however, supported by his successor, Wilkinson, who wrote to the Supreme Government on 30th June 1840, quoting the treaties of 1826 and 1829, which clearly showed that good faith and justice demanded that the right to adopt a successor should be allowed to the ruler or his widow. Wilkinson's view was based strictly on considerations of what was correct and legal, according to the terms of the treaty, because, he confesses, "I should have been glad if I could have coincided in opinion with Mr. Cavendish, for, the course he recommends would be most beneficial and gratifying to the mass of the population of this State, who desire nothing so much as to be placed under the British Government . . . the only people who would regret the change are a few favourites about the court and their followers."

A careful study of the minute of the Governor-General, dated 28th January 1854, reveals that it was neither the solicitude for "the mass of the population of the State", nor the anxiety to conform to the terms of the treaty, that decided the issue. It was rather because "regard for the essential manufacturing interests of England forbids in alienating a second time possessions which would materially aid in removing our most urgent manufacturing difficulty." The Governor-General also urges that "regard for the general interests of India forbids our throwing away a territory, the possession of which would combine our military strength, would enlarge our commercial resources and would greatly tend to consolidate our power." These were the considerations of colonial British interests that mainly decided the question of annexation. Lord Dalhousie concludes his long note with the recommendation that "by the death of the Raja of Nagpur, without any heir whatever, the possession of his territories has reverted to the British Government which gave them : and further, that the possession thus regained should not again be given away, since their alienation a second time is called for by no obligation of justice or equity, and it is forbidden by every consideration of sound policy."

In the Governor-General's Council, the only dissentient voice in this connection was that of Colonel Low, who tried in two closely-argued notes, to establish that the British Government had

no right whatever to apply the Doctrine of Lapse to the Nagpur kingdom, and even if it had, that it was impolitic to do so. The opinion of Colonel Low was, however, overruled, and the Court of Directors, concurring in the views of Lord Dalhousie, ordered that "it had been determined on grounds, both of right and policy, to incorporate the State of Nagpur with the British territories."

In his memorandum on the subject, Ellis, who was Deputy Commissioner of Nagpur, admits that "looking calmly at the manner in which the State of Nagpur has become a portion of British India, it is difficult to regard it as other than an exercise of the paramount power in support of what was considered by Dalhousie as a necessary policy. It is impossible to deny that the Bhonsla family have suffered grievously by the exercise of this power." The annexation is clearly contrary to the solemn guarantee which the British authorities had given, that "the dominions of the Nagpur State will be continued to the Raja Raghujii Bhonsla and his heirs and successors." Neither the argument that the kingdom was given as a grant by the British to Raghujii Rao after the deposition of Appa Sahib, nor the view that the adoption of Yeshwant Rao Ahir Rao, was invalid, can be logically held in view of all the commitments which the British Government had entered into. By all accepted law and by tradition, the kingdom should have been conferred on the adopted son of the late Raja who, it will be remembered, went through all the formal religious ceremony of adoption and also officiated at the funeral ceremony of the late Raja. But considerations of policy, rather than any respect for justice, decided the issue, and the territory finally and illegally passed out of the hands of the ruling dynasty.

Thus disappeared the ancient kingdom of the Bhonslas and the Resident at Nagpur, Mr. Mansel, was appointed Commissioner and was asked to take over the administration of the kingdom. The effect of this historic change in the status and control of Nagpur territories was felt deeply, not only by those of the palace and the Court of Bhonslas, but also by the people. Apart from the long history and tradition of the house of Bhonslas, the last Raja of Nagpur was a popular ruler, gifted with a sociable and kindly disposition. The Resident, Mr. Mansel, himself bears testimony to the king's popularity. In his letter, dated 14th December 1853, written soon after the Raja's death, he says :

"He is good-natured and pleasing in his manners and was very popular with his subjects from his condescension. Even now if a man of respectability has suffered any indignity from any of the police guards and troops, he will send for the

aggrieved party, soothe him with kind words and send him away with a present of clothes . . . In his visits to the houses of respectable natives, he shows much affability and indeed familiarity. As a Maratha he seems to feel that he has sprung from the people, and in forms he would, by strangers, have been thought rather the President of a Republic than the arbitrary monarch of a great State."

It is, therefore, not surprising that on the death of such a popular and respected ruler, there should be deep regret throughout the State, which was further embittered by the arbitrary and, in the people's view, unjust action of the British Government in annexing the kingdom and destroying the dynasty of the Bhonslas.

The agitation in the popular mind caused by the policy of the British is revealed by two posters which, at that time, were found stuck on the wall of the temple of Jagruteshwar in Nagpur city, which have been luckily preserved. One of the posters contains an appeal to the people, particularly to the priests to offer prayers in the temple so that God may avert the situation that followed the death of the Raja and the proposed escheat of the Nagpur State. This poster read as follows:—

॥श्री॥

श्री. जागृतेश्वराये नमः ।

स्वस्ति श्री नागपूरस्थ सर्कार आश्रित व निराश्रित सर्व ब्राम्हण मंडळी शास्त्री पंडित राज्यापाध्ये व सर्व वैदिक व याज्ञिक व जोसि व मांत्रीक, सकळ चतुर्वेदि व डोंग्या वावादि सर्व साधू मंडळीस सूचना केलि जाते, श्रीमंत रघुजि राजा निवर्तल्यामुळें हिंदुंचे स्वस्थानाचा भवसा राहिला नाहि या साठी सांगणें आहे जे त्रैलोक्याधिपति श्री. जागृतेश्वर ग्रामामध्ये जागृत आहे वर लिहिलेले मंडळीस ब्राम्हण्याचि व स्वस्थानाचि जरूर आहे तर सर्वत्राहि आजपासून देवळांत येऊन रुद्राभिषेक व जप व स्तोत्र स्मरण अधिकारा रूपे करावे तन्हे करून सर्वाहाचे कल्याण होईल जे या काळी न येतिल ते ब्राम्हण विजावेगळे जानावे जे या चौशाखेमध्ये ग्रहस्थ मुत्सद्दी (संभावित) ग्रामामध्ये मंडळिस साहच्य न होतिल त्याहाचि सोध न ठेवितिल ते आपले बा (पच्या) (पो) टचे न होये ते चांडाळ जानावे. धाज—न सर्वत्राहि—कळावे.

The English version of the poster is as follows:—

"With obeisance to Lord Jagruteshwar, hereby all the Brahmin priests residing in Nagpur, whether dependent on Government or not, all persons such as Shastris, Pandits, Priests or Vaidliks and Yajniks as well as Joshis and Mantriks, followers of the four Vedas, and all Sadhus—all persons are directed that following the death of Raja Raghuji there is great anxiety whether the Hindu State will exist. All persons are, therefore, informed that they have a duty to their priesthood and to the Nagpur State to pray to Lord Jagruteshwar,

Lord of all the three worlds. All Brahmins should assemble from today in the temple and perform *Rudrabhishek*, *Jap* and recite *Stotras* according to their ability, so as to bring blessings of God. Those who fail to do this duty are warned that they will not be considered to be born of Brahmins. All other Brahmins, who are not priests, such as Grahasthis and Mussaddis who do not co-operate with the priests in this work will be considered not to be born of Brahmins but to be Chandalas."

The other poster which was found on the temple wall refers to one Dadoba Shirke who was a relation of the Bhonsla, but had helped the British in bringing the Bhonsla Raj to an end. The poster chastises him for his act of disloyalty. It reads as follows:—

श्री

श्री महाराज दादोबा सीरके, आपन सरकाराचे आप्त आमुन मन्हाठा मंडळीला डाग लावला. राजे बुडउन काये मीळनार आहे परन्तु तुम्हास लाज नाही. तुम्ही मुलकावर नाव मिळवला की मन्हाटे नीमक हराम जाले परन्तु आपन बाकांवाडे, बाहादराची आज्ञा मोडून राजे बुडविले. काही गादीची आशा गरीबा दुबळ्यास ते तुम्ही बुडवीता. दादोबा, तुम्हाला आनं गुरूची, तुम्हाला आनं गडची, तुम्हाला आनं कुळस्वामीची, माझालात जाऊ नका, येथु हद जाली.

The translation of the poster reads:

"To Maharaj Dadoba Shirke. You being a relation of the Bhonsla Sarkar, have dishonoured the Mahratha race. What gain did you get by helping in destroying the State, but you are shameless. You have earned by yourself the disgrace that the Mahrathas are dishonest to the salt which they eat, because you have brought to an end the State by disobeying the order of Baka Bai. You have ended the *Gadi* which was a support to the poor and the weak. Dadoba, I adjure you, in the name of your Guru, the name of the Cow and of your family deity that you will never again enter the palace. That is all."

These two posters which have fortunately survived the lapse of time, are perhaps only specimens of many like these that must have been freely circulated in the City of Nagpur, giving expression to the public horror and disgust caused by the annexation of the State and the termination of the House of Bhonsla. There appears to be no doubt that among the many causes which contributed to the nationwide outbreak, four years later, one of the most potent was this popular discontent and disapproval of the high-handed action of the British authorities against the rulers of the States.



श्री॥

॥१॥ ताम्र ते श्रुतमेवम॥

हमारे श्रीताम्रपूरस्य सकीर आश्रित्य निराश्रित  
सर्व ब्राह्मण मंडली राह्यी पंडी तरा ज्योपाध्ये वस  
नी देव कवया न कवतो सिव मा नी कस कळव  
वी देव ज्योपाध्ये वादि सर्व साधु पंडली सस्य  
ना वे लि जाते, नी मंतर पुजि ता जाति वर्तल्या म  
हि हे, न स स्था ना न भव सा रा हि का ना हि का स  
सा मने अ हे ज्योपाध्ये धि पति श्री ताम्र ते श्रुत  
मा मध्ये जा गत आहे व लि लि लि ले मंडली स ब्रा  
ह्मण्या चि व स स्था ना चि त स प आहे तर सर्व ना हि  
आज पासून देव का तये उन रुद्रा भिषे व त प न स्तो  
त्र सा प अधि कौ रूपे क रा वे त ने क रा रा व हा ने  
क त्या ण होई ल जे या का ली ना ये ल ने श्री प्रण वि  
जा ये ग के जा ना वे त पु न रा ने म ये म ह स्य सा दि  
ताम्र मा मध्ये मंडलि स सा ह न हो त क  
ग हा चि सो य न टे यि ती ल ते आ पु ले बा  
ठ ये न हो ये ते चां डा क म ना वे या ज न  
न स व मो ति ते ना वे

ॐ महाशजहादोबासीरकेआपनस  
 रकारचेआसलासुनप्रहटप्रहळीला  
 ठागलावलाशजेबुडुनकायेभीच  
 नाआहेपरंतुलासलाजनाही  
 दुमीमुळकावरतवभीष्टवलाकी  
 म्हाटेनीमकहशमजालेपरंतुआ  
 पक्याकबाडवाहादराचीआप्य  
 मेहुनराजेबुडुनलेकाहीगादी  
 चीमरागरीबहुवळ्यसतेमुझी  
 बुडुनलाहादोबासुझालजानगुरु  
 चिठ्ठाकालजानगुरुचिठ्ठाका  
 जानबुडुनसीजमहालबन  
 जमहालबन

Photostat copy of the second poster found on the walls  
 of Nagpur in 1853

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BHONSLA JEWELS

The annexation of Nagpur was accompanied by another act of highhanded confiscation which at that time caused deep resentment among the people. The Bhonsla palace contained one of the splendid collections of jewels among the ruling princes of India. Popular estimate placed the value of this private treasure at between Rs. 50 lakhs and Rs. 75 lakhs. There was also a considerable amount of cash and gold mohars, which was estimated at about Rs. 20 lakhs. One of the first acts of the British, after the death of Raghuji III. was to seize this entire treasure. The letter of the Court of Directors to the Governor-General approving the annexation of the Nagpur Territory especially stated:

“We are well assured that you will provide liberally for the ladies of the late Raja's family, and for all who may be able to establish a good claim to pensionary support.”

In compliance of this direction, the Resident was asked by Government of India to send his proposals for making the necessary provision. The Minute of the Governor-General said:

“Liberal provision should be made for the Ranees, and the connections of the late Bhonsla family; full consideration should be shown for the interests of old and respectable servants of the State; and the Court and, more especially, the Military establishments should be readjusted, with a steady regard to the contentment of those whose interests are involved, and to the preservation of general tranquillity, rather than to any immediate augmentation of disposable revenue.”

Mr. Mansel who was, at the time of the Raja's death, the Resident at Nagpur was appointed Commissioner, and was asked to report the arrangements to be made for the civil administration of the province. Mansel was, through his long association with the ruling family of Nagpur, naturally moved by sadness of the situation, of vanished glory and of the extinction of a royal lineage. He, therefore, made generous recommendations for the Bhonsla family in his report of the 29th April 1854, and suggested the creation of titular principality in Nagpur. He recommended that a hereditary title of Raja may be conferred on the head of the family, together with a hereditary estate and a hereditary income amounting to about one-sixth of the revenues of Nagpur. The



Governor-General and his Council considered these proposals excessively generous. In fact, they appear to have felt that the approach of Mansel to the whole question was contrary to the policy and intentions of the Supreme Government towards Nagpur administration. Mansel was soon after removed from his appointment.

In the place of the recommendations made by Mansel, it was decided that a stipend of Rs. 1,20,000 a year should be granted to Baka Bai, Rs. 60,000 a year to the Senior Rani Annapurna Bai, Rs. 40,000 each to the other widows, Rs. 10,000 to the widow of Appa Saheb and Rs. 20,000 to the other ladies of the zenana. As regards the private treasure of the Raja also the proposals of Mansel that the treasure should be left with the family "to be disposed of by them in such a way as was most agreeable to their feelings", were considered unreasonable by the Governor-General in Council. Lord Dalhousie minuted on this subject as follows:—

"Besides these stipends, the Commissioner proposes that the treasure and jewels, amounting together to the estimated value of from 70 to 95 lakhs of rupees, should be left with the family to be disposed of by them in such way as was most agreeable to their feelings, and would be generally approved of by the courtiers and the native public.

"In the despatch of the 7th March, the Government of India informed the Resident that liberal provision should be made for the Ranees and the connections of the late Bhonsla family. The concessions, however, proposed by the Commissioner appear to me to go beyond what would be approved by the Court of Directors, even under the instructions quoted above.

"In 1848, the Raja of Sattara died, and his territories lapsed, as those of Nagpore have now lapsed, to the British Government. The Raja of Sattara was the head of the Maharratta tribe, of which the Bhonsla family was a recent and subordinate branch. The Ranees and the adopted son were allowed to retain jewels, etc., to the value of Rs. 16 lakhs, and landed property worth Rs. 20,000 a year. Pensions were also granted to the three Ranees of Rs. 45,000, Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 25,000, respectively.

"Yet, although the Sattara family was of far higher rank and dignity than the Bhonslas, and although the provision conceded to members of it was much less than that now proposed by the Commissioner, the Honourable Court, while they declared their desire "to provide liberally" for the family, and other personal property suitable to their rank," still objected

that the grant of "so much property, which was fairly at the disposal of Government", was greatly in excess of what was required.

"Adverting to these remarks of the Honourable Court, I apprehend that so profuse a provision as that suggested by the Commissioner would certainly not meet with the approval of the Honourable Court, especially when made in favour of the widows merely, and in the absence of any adopted child.

"It is not, I think, desirable that the property which the Honourable Court has considered to be "fairly at the disposal of the Government", should be alienated from the family; but neither should it be given up to be appropriated and squandered by the Ranees.

"I would, therefore, propose that jewels and furniture, and other personal property suitable to their rank, having been allotted to the Ranees, the value of the rest of the jewels, etc., should be realised, and that the proceeds should be constituted a fund for the benefit of the Bhonsla family.

"As the Commissioner seems to think that the value likely to be realised has been overestimated, the Government should be prepared to make up any sums that may be wanting to afford adequate stipends to the family."

It is clear from Lord Dalhousie's minute that the private treasure of the Bhonsla family was being confiscated because there was no adopted child and it was apprehended that the Ranees might squander the money. Though it is intended that the property should not be alienated from the family, it was taken for granted that the income from the fund constituted by the sale of the jewels could be used towards meeting part of the cost of the stipends sanctioned.

On July 15th, 1854, the Resident's Assistant came to the palace and informed the Ranees that they were to be pensioned and that, with the exception of a small portion of the gems and other articles, all the family property would be seized on behalf of Government. The protests and appeals made by Baka Bai and other Ranees proved unavailing. Deeply hurt and humiliated by the summary manner in which the Resident proceeded in this matter, the Ranees refused to render any assistance in the regulation of their future establishment. The Resident, however, sent Lieutenant Crichton to the palace to prepare a list of what he proposed to leave for the use of the Bhonsla family, and in this task he was assisted by two of the palace men, Parbat Rao and Jamaluddin, who thereby incurred the wrath of the people.

Referring to the confiscation of the Bhonsla treasure, Major Bell remarks:

"The appropriation of the property was a most scandalous outrage; and the moral discredit and political dishonour entailed by it on our Government, and the profound disgust excited by it in many parts of India besides Nagpur can hardly be exaggerated, and certainly ought not to be lightly regarded."

Referring to the disturbances that took place in the city at that time, Colonel Elliot mentions in his despatch, dated the 3rd November 1854:

"There was great excitement in the city and he was obliged to employ a detachment of 500 men. An express was also sent off to Kamptee to reinforce Sitabuldi with an infantry corps. During the disturbance a Christian Missionary Mr. Hislop, who was mistaken for an officer, was maltreated by the mob. The infuriated people also attacked Jamaluddin, an official of the palace, now employed by the British."

These incidents clearly indicate the general effect produced and the popular feeling excited by the confiscation of the Bhonsla treasure.

By the end of October 1854, 136 bags of treasure had been moved out of the palace to the British treasury. It is reported in contemporary records that the Indians who assisted in the transfer of the treasure became the objects of the people's rage. Some of them were beaten and maltreated by the people, and Jamaluddin and Parbat Rao became the special targets of mob fury. They were dubbed as traitors and enemies of the State. Of the leaders of the palace group, those who opposed the confiscation of the Bhonsla treasure were arrested. Among them was Madhao Rao Fadnavis and eight others. They were charged of conspiracy to dispute the sovereignty of the province of Nagpur and to disturb the minds of the people on the question of the validity of the British rule.

The sale by public auction of the palace animals including a large number of elephants and horses was held in Nagpur but failed to realise an adequate price for them. The remaining part of the treasure consisting of all the rare jewellery was sent to Calcutta where Messrs. Hamilton and Company were appointed auctioneers. A news item which appeared in the *Times of India*, dated the 8th August 1855, refers to this auction and says:

"It is stated that the value of the jewellery of the Nagpur Raja would be about Rs. 11 lakhs, but there are grounds to expect that it would fetch not less than Rs. 15 lakhs in the

auction. From the samples which we have inspected, it appears that the taste of the Nagpur Rajas was decidedly superior to that of the other native Chiefs."

The press report further goes to describe some of the wonderful pieces of jewellery displayed for auction, among which were goblets and flower-pots studded with jewels, a very beautiful hukka with gems studded on all sides, diamonds of immense size and weight, necklaces, gold trappings of horses and elephants, royal gold ornaments with beautiful diamonds, pearls, rubies and emeralds, etc. The *Calcutta Morning Chronicle*, dated the 12th October 1855, published a full-page advertisement about the public auction of these treasures.

In the minute, dated the 10th June 1854, the Governor-General had proposed that "the jewels and furniture and other personal property suitable to their rank having been allotted to the Ranees, the value of the rest of the jewels and treasures should be constituted into a fund for the benefit of the Bhonsla family." The amount realised by the sale of the treasure together with the cash taken from the palace, according to a report submitted by Major Eliot, Commissioner of Nagpur, on the 10th January 1860, was Rs. 25,88,271-9-7½. This sum was arrived at as follows:—

- (1) Sale-proceeds of jewels, etc.—Rs. 23,02,460-8-7¼.
- (2) Cash received from the palace—Rs. 4,27,657-11¼.

*Deduct* commission for sale and transit charges—  
Rs. 1,41,846-10-0.

The value of the jewels made over to the Ranees for their own use was given by Major Eliot as between Rs. 10 lakhs to Rs. 12 lakhs.

In regard to the utilization of the treasure, the Commissioner had suggested that a part of it should be used for paying the arrears due by the late Raja's Khasgi establishment. The Governor-General approved of this proposal and added "it was not a private treasure derived from private estate or from personal sources of any kind: it was a revenue hoarded by the Raja: it ought to have been applied to the payments of arrears instead of so hoarded, and it should now be applied to the purpose on which it ought originally to have been expended". In reply to the Commissioner's request for instructions regarding the formation of the Bhonsla Fund out of the value of the property sold, he was informed that these instructions would be issued after the Commissioner had reported the actual amount realized. In the meantime, the Commissioner was authorised to pay the full amount of the several stipends sanctioned out of the Government treasure. Accordingly,

after the sale-proceeds were realized, the arrears due to the Khasgi establishment were debited to the fund. After the debit the amount in the Bhonsla Fund was reduced to Rs. 19¾ lakhs.

It is necessary to notice at this point that the Bhonsla Fund so constituted arose out of the sale of the private property of the Raja. One of the reasons why this private treasure was not handed over to the Ranees, as it should have been, was that there was no legally adopted child and it was, therefore, feared that the Ranees might squander away the money. (See Lord Dalhousie's minute.) It is, however, clear that according to Hindu Law there was an heir to the property of the late Raja, as a close relation of Raghuji III had been adopted by the widow of the late Raghuji. In a memorandum to the Governor-General, Mr. Ellis, who was Deputy Commissioner, Nagpur, gives this account of adoption effected by the Ranees:—

“ Upon the death of the Raja, a consultation was held by his family when, acting on the advice of Her Highness Baka Bai, the late Raghuji's grandmother, who always had great influence in the Nagpur State, the widowed Ranees determined, as a mark of deference to the British Government, to delay the formal and irrevocable adoption of Yeshwant Rao Ahir Rao, the close male relative of the late Raja, until a reference had been made to the Governor-General at Calcutta. The Ranees had already adopted and chosen Yeshwant Rao as their son before the Raja's death. Immediately after the Raja's death, their Highnesses the Baka Bai and Annapurna Bai, the latter being the Raja's senior widow, sent for Nana Ahir Rao and his son Yeshwant Rao, and in the presence of their relations, Nana Ahir Rao formally consented to resign his son to Annapurna Bai. It was Yeshwant Rao Ahir Rao who officiated at the Raja's funeral. The ceremony which they put off out of deference to the British Government was the public procession with their adopted son and giving him a name. It is thus clear that the ceremony of adoption had been made according to Hindu Law by the senior widow of the late Raja, immediately after the Raja's death. The only part of the ceremony which was postponed was the public procession. Baka Bai, who knew the importance of obtaining the orders from Calcutta in this regard, had advised the family that until these orders were received, the public ceremony of giving a name of the young Raja and the usual procession and installation should not take place. In fact, it is clear from record that even in his own lifetime Raghuji III had looked upon young Yeshwant Rao as his son, and as year by year the prospects of the Raja having an offspring of his own appeared to diminish, all the family and followers of the Court

became accustomed to treat the young prince as the destined successor to the Masnad. If then an adoption had taken place immediately after the death of the late Raghuji, one of the main reasons given by the Governor-General for taking possession of the treasure, namely, the absence of an adopted son and the danger of the money being squandered by the women, had no force." This being the case, it would have been reasonable for the Ranees to expect that the money that was realised from the sale of the property would be restored to the adopted son. The fact, however, was quite different. Though, according to the original intention, the proceeds of the sale were to have been invested and constituted into a separate Bhonsla Fund, the amount was actually never invested. In order to complete the narrative regarding what happened to the Bhonsla Fund, it is necessary to anticipate the events that happened after the great revolt of 1857. During the revolt, the Nagpur Territory had remained quiet largely due to the influence of Baka Bai. In grateful recognition of this fact, the Court of Directors instructed the Governor-General to take into consideration the case of Janoji Bhonsla which was the name given to Yeshwant Rao Abir Rao after his adoption and make his recommendations. The Court of Directors stated:

"We have always been of opinion that although we could not admit his right to the sovereignty of Nagpore, the position in which the youth has been placed gives him strong claims to the consideration of the British Government. In the belief that ample provision would be made for him from the private property of the Ranees, who have adopted him as their heir, we have hitherto abstained from settling upon him a fixed stipend from the revenue of the Province. But since our Despatch of 15th July 1857 was written, we have received information which leads us to doubt whether we may not have estimated at too high an amount the value of the property not, on the transfer of the Government, appropriate to the State. But whatever the amount of this private property may be, we are willing that, irrespective of any provision from this source, you should in recognition of the good conduct of the Bhonsla family during the recent crisis settle a handsome stipend (the amount of which we leave it to your judgment to decide) upon the youth, whom by common consent they have put forth as the representative of their house."

As a result of these instructions, the Commissioner recommended the grant of a stipend of Rs. 90,000 per year to Janoji, to be raised gradually as other stipends lapsed, to Rs. 1,20,000 per annum, which was the amount allowed to Baka Bai up to her death

in 1859. The Government of India accepted this recommendation, but made it liable to revision on the death of Janoji. The Bhonsla Fund, however, continued to be with the Government. In 1862, the Government of India issued another comprehensive direction regarding this Fund, saying:

“With respect to the general application of the Bhonsla Fund, His Excellency in Council considers that it should be regarded not as a source of maintenance for those who have public and political claims to the consideration of Government, but as a provision for those dependents of the late Raja, who are clearly deserving of our compassion, though they may have no absolute right to support out of the revenue of the province. With this view, I am directed to inform you that the Governor-General in Council sanctions the disbursements already made out of the Bhonsla Fund to the extent to Rs. 10,77,530-11-0; and that he is of opinion that the balance of Rs. 17,99,680-12-9 should be converted into stock, bearing 5 per cent interest; and that the following disbursements, under the respective heads of ‘Palace Stipends’ and ‘Khasgee Civil List’, should be henceforward charged to the yearly interest accruing from the Fund.”

The amount chargeable to the annual interest included a sum of Rs. 14,656-6-0 on account of temple charges. The point to note is that whereas originally the Fund was intended to be utilised for the Bhonsla family, now it was to be used for the dependents of the late Rajah who were not in receipt of pensions or stipends on public or political grounds. It appears that the family can claim that this amounts to a breach of faith.

Richard Temple, Chief Commissioner of Nagpur, discusses this aspect in a letter written on 14th May 1863, and adverting to the possibility of a claim to the Bhonsla Fund being put forward at a future date by the Bhonsla family, states as his own view that “after a careful perusal of the whole of the correspondence in the case, the family can have no present claim to any part of the income of the Bhonsla Fund”.

In accordance with the orders of the Secretary of State for India, a sum of Rs. 3 lakhs was debited to the fund for the support of the temples, which, together with other deductions from time to time, brought the fund down to Rs. 13,82,000 in 1864, i.e., ten years after the fund was created. It was then decided that since the income from the fund even at 5 per cent was not likely to be sufficient to meet the charge to be debited to the fund, and as

the revenues of the country had borne, and were likely to bear for a considerable time, a large portion of the expenditure on stipends and pensions, the amount in the credit of the fund should be merged into the general revenues.

It will be thus seen that the policy in regard to the Bhonsla Fund had changed considerably between 1854 and 1864, until the Fund was finally absorbed in the general revenues. The private treasure of the Rajah which normally should have been passed by inheritance, according to the personal law, to the Ranees and the adopted son of the Raja, was firstly taken possession of and converted into cash with the ostensible purpose of preventing the money being squandered by the women. It was clearly expressed, at that time, that the money would be used for the benefit of the Bhonsla family. Subsequently, various items of expenditure which, in the normal course, according to the custom of the times, would have been debited to the current revenues of the State, were debited to this Fund. Thereafter, the purpose of the Fund was again altered, and it was decided that the income from it should be utilised, not for the benefit of the family as originally intended, but for granting pensions and allowances to the dependents of the late Raja. Again, a substantial portion of the Fund was handed over to trustees for the maintenance of certain temples which in a Hindu kingdom would have been treated as a legitimate charge on the general revenues. The Raja's family was, therefore, justified in feeling that it had been unjustly treated in this regard. In a precisely parallel case, that of the *Ranee of Tanjore v. The East India Company*, which was tried in Madras, the decision was in favour of the Rani's claim, and contradicted the opinion laid down and acted upon by Dalhousie in the case of the Bhonsla Ranis. The property of the Rani of Tanjore was returned by Government of India to her, but the pleadings and petitions of the Ranee of Nagpur went unheard. This smouldering sense of grievance contributed to the outbreak of 1857, and continued to embitter the relationship with the foreign power in Nagpur.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GATHERING STORM

The wise and worldly philosopher, Lord Bacon, in one of his well-known essays, enumerates the causes that may lead to sedition and troubles :

“The causes and motives for sedition (also for revolt) are, innovations in religion, taxes, alterations of laws and customs, breaking of privileges, general oppression, advancement of unworthy persons, strangers, dearths, disbanded soldiers, factions grown desperate and whatsoever in offending people joineth them in a common cause.”

Most if not all these evils had grown and multiplied in India during the forty years between the collapse of the Maratha power and the revolt of 1857. Kings and chieftains had been deposed, privileges had been destroyed, and historic families liquidated. Thousands of disbanded soldiers belonging to the former rulers roamed about the country with no occupation. New laws and new taxes pressed with a heavy burden upon an impoverished people. In the vast territories that had been annexed by conquest or by the device of the Doctrine of Lapse, the land settlements which had been made were oppressive in the extreme. In the kingdom of Oudh, in the Nagpur territories and in Bundelkhand, a large number of chiefs and landlords had been dispossessed. In Bombay Presidency alone, for instance, 20,000 holdings had been confiscated as a result of the proceedings of the Inam Commission appointed by Dalhousie to investigate the titles of land-owners. The dispossessed zamindars and taluqdars all over the country nursed a genuine grievance on this score. So hateful had some of the newly established offices and the administration of the British become to the people that in Patna the Educational Inspector's office was popularly called '*Shaitani Daftar*'—'The Devil's office'! Some of the measures of social legislation which Dalhousie had introduced also added to the general state of uneasiness and suspicion in the minds of the people. The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act of 1856, and the Religious Disabilities Act of 1850 which gave protection of civil rights to Hindus who were converted to another religion, together with the aggressive proselytising activities of Christian missionaries, created in the popular mind the fear that the Government was out to destroy the social fabric and the traditions of the land, and convert India to Christianity.

Some of the reforms, like the abolition of Sati, were not calculated to reassure the people who were apprehensive that the foreign rule might soon undermine the traditional religious and social institutions in the country. The English conquerors, unlike the other invaders of India of earlier times, not only kept themselves aloof from the life and the people of the country, but proceeded systematically to disrupt the basic traditions of the life and people of the country. The British invader did not realise that he was entering a country which already enjoyed a highly organised civilization, much older than his own. Ignorant of the background of the country which he entered, proud of the civilization which he represented, he went about blindly knocking down everything that he did not understand. The result was that a widespread feeling of opposition was created everywhere, which for a time, was inarticulate, being overawed by the superior strength of the rulers.

Naturally the classes most hit were those who had much to lose—the ruling and proprietary classes. The vast masses of the people also, in time, began to feel the burden of foreign rule, especially as the land-revenue demands began to increase five-fold and eight-fold, and the crafts and industries began to suffer by the competition of imported goods. The social structure in the country was so organised that the initiative for leadership and the responsibility for any movement of resistance had to come from the feudal leaders. The people looked up to them for guidance and were traditionally habituated to following their lead. The first phase of India's movement for asserting her freedom, therefore, had necessarily to be a struggle under feudal leadership, a struggle by the great dispossessed, by the elements of conservatism, if you like, but none the less the custodians of the prevailing order of the country. As Sardar Panikkar says :

“It is true that all the leaders of the rebellion came from among the great dispossessed ; but all were united in the object they had in view, the expulsion of the British and the recovery of national independence. In that sense the mutiny was no mutiny at all, but a great national uprising.” (A Survey of Indian History, page 206).

Long before the explosion took place in 1857, the inequities and violence that had been committed throughout the country, from Mysore and the Carnatic to Punjab and Oudh had laid up a store of highly inflammable feelings which was only waiting for a spark to set fire to it. In the words of Bacon.

“If there be fuel prepared it is hard to tell whence the spark shall come that shall set it on fire.”

The fuel for the fire had been gathered in adequate quantities, especially in the central parts of India. The last surviving Peshwa, Bajirao II, who was living an exile at Bithur, died on 14th January 1851. Dalhousie at once stopped his pension of eight lakhs of rupees a year which Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa, rightly felt should have been continued to him.

The efforts to restore the pension ended in failure and his Vakil, Azimulla Khan, who had gone to England to plead his case before the Court of Directors, returned disappointed. Nana Saheb felt that the only way to obtain justice was by subverting the British rule. Azimulla Khan says in his diary that soon after he returned from England, Nana Saheb proceeded on a long tour of Upper India in order to consult other rulers and zamindars about a plan to fight the British. He stayed with the Nawab of Lucknow, and then, under the guise of a pilgrim, he visited the leaders of Oudh, Bundelkhand and parts of Central India. He also got in touch with the troops, especially the so-called Bengal Army, and gathered that there was a widespread sense of revolt prevalent among them. The new rules requiring the regiments to fight overseas and the recent drive for economy had made some regiments of sepoys far from friendly towards the Company. Some years before 1857 a spirit of discontent and defiance of authority was thus already wide-spread in some of the important regiments. This gave Nana Saheb and other leaders considerable hope, because an armed rising against the Government was possible only with the support of the army.

Following the annexation of Nagpur and Satara, another historic State, joined to the other two by close ties of kinship and association, had recently fallen into the grasping hands of Dalhousie. When the ruler of Jhansi, Raja Gangadhar Rao, died on 21st November 1853, he left behind him a young prince, formally and regularly adopted by him in the presence of the Political Agent, Major Ellis, and the Commandant, Major Marton. He also left behind him as Regent, the great Rani Laxmibai, whom Major Malcolm described in 1854, as "highly respected and esteemed, and fully capable of doing justice to her charge as Regent, a lady of very high character, and much respected by every one at Jhansi". And yet the British Government, by a curious logic, decided that "the adoption was good for the conveyance of private rights, though not for the transfer of the Principality". The kingdom of Jhansi was thus annexed by Dalhousie and administered by an Agent. The Rani of Jhansi appealed against this action, but to no better purpose than the appeals of the other dispossessed rulers,

Of all the high-handed annexations of Lord Dalhousie none has given more offence, none is more in violation of faith and of the clear terms of the treaty, than the annexation of Jhansi. Not only were the protests of the Rani unheeded, but she was called upon to pay the debts of her husband, the late Raja, from out of the meagre allowance that had been granted to her ! Meanness was added to injustice ; deprived of her kingdom, she retired to her palace, where she meditated the course to recover her heritage. She practised riding, fencing and shooting, and acquired an excellent skill in all these arts. When Nana Sahib started sending his emissaries to the rulers and chieftains of India, in order to sound them, he found in the Rani of Jhansi a leader who had the cause, will and justification for taking arms against the British. Nana Sahib and Rani Laxmi Bai had, in fact, been friends and play-mates from childhood. Another companion of the childhood days was the famous Tatyá Topé, of whom we shall hear more later. They had received military training under the watchful eye of the ex-Peshwa, Baji Rao, while he lived an exile at Bithur. And now they found themselves comrades in arms, joined in a grand and desperate adventure to wrest the country from the foreigner's hold.

In Nagpur itself there were all the elements favourable for an uprising : a recent annexation involving patent injustice ; a historic family extinguished by the high-handed fiat of the British, although an undoubted representative of the late Raja was alive ; a local aristocracy who had lost, with their rule, all their importance and their privileges ; the country denuded of European troops, there being only the Madras regiment at Kamptee available for service. And yet it was not in Nagpur that the first spark was lit ; it was in far away Meerut. Much has been made of the 'greased cartridges' as the cause for the Revolt. What appears to be the truth is that the cartridge incident merely "precipitated the Mutiny before it had been thoroughly organised and before adequate arrangements had been made for making it a first step to a popular insurrection". (Sir James Outram). The storm had been steadily gathering for some years. Apart from the warning which Sleeman gave Dalhousie, that "the annexation of Oudh would cost the British power more than the value of ten such kingdoms", the discerning Englishmen themselves were able to realise that beneath the apparent placidity of the Indian scene, deep unrest was brewing. Sir Charles Metcalfe confessed, "I expect to wake up one fine day and find India lost to the English Crown". Lord Canning himself, who had the misfortune to preside over the British territories in India during the fateful

years of the Great Revolt, had a premonition, even before his departure from England, that he "discerned in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud, at first no bigger than a man's hand but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst, and overwhelm us with ruin".

One of the consequences of the development of communications was the birth of the newspaper. Although originally meant only for giving the English community in India news of their motherland and of official happenings, the Press grew in time to be a mouthpiece of public opinion. In 1835, when Metcalfe was acting as Governor-General, during the interval between Bentinck's resignation and Auckland's appointment, he repealed all the Press control laws. There were many British officers who considered this an unwise step. About ten years previously Sir Thomas Munro had earnestly urged that a free Press and an autocratic Government by foreigners were incompatible. "For, what is the first duty of a free Press? It is to deliver the country from the foreign yoke." But Metcalfe, imbued with the spirit of Liberalism, was convinced that "a tenure dependent on attempts to suppress public opinion could not be lasting both because such a tenure must be rotten, and because such attempts must fail". The repeal of the Press Laws gave an impetus to the growth of Indian newspapers which soon became the forum for the discussion of public issues. For instance, *The Hindu Patriot*, started in 1853, strongly criticised the annexations of Dalhousie. Among the causes that led to the outbreak of 1857, the newly sprung Indian newspapers should be reckoned as a powerful factor. No wonder that Canning found it necessary to reimpose censorship on the Press during 1857-58.

Signs of the approaching storm had begun to appear at least six months before it actually broke. Malleeson describes how as early as in December 1856, indications were not wanting that some great event was looming before the eyes of the people. Sitting outside his tent in Narsinghpur, Captain Ternan, the Deputy Commissioner, saw the kotwal running up to him, breathless and panting, carrying in his hands some small *chapatties* which had been received in the village that morning. The meaning of these wheat-cakes was clear enough to anyone who had experience of the 1842 rising. They were a symbol and a message, telling the people that they were to be prepared for a sudden and dangerous event that would come upon them. Like the fiery cross sent round among the Highlands of Scotland, these *chapatties* were meant to prepare the minds of the people for a rising. They were the harbingers of the coming storm. As Malleeson says, "They originated in the brain

of the Oudh conspirators, of the men made conspirators by the annexation of their country, and they were sent to every village for the very object divined by Ternan,—the object of unsettling men's minds, of preparing them for the unforeseen”.

It is sometimes argued that the uprising of 1857 was without any pre-conceived plan and leadership. But what has been stated earlier would go to indicate that there was a plan behind the movement. We hear of messages and rumours spreading from one place to another several months before 1857. The villages had been alerted by the message of the wheat-cakes. The fact that no letters or documents revealing a concerted plan have come down to us is no proof to the contrary. On a mission of this seriousness and secrecy, written documents would hardly be used, and even if they existed, those who possessed them would have been careful enough to destroy them lest they should fall into British hands. The movement of 1857 was the first agitation which had an all-India character. It affected all places from Meerut to Kolhapur. It involved both Hindus and Muslims; the army as well as the civilians joined it. The fact that there were large tracts of the country which were not affected by the uprising of 1857 does not, by itself, take away from it its comprehensive and nation-wide character. Circumstanced as many of the feudatory princes and chieftains were under the British, they perforce had to watch the turn of events, and shape their action according to the situation as it developed. It was very clear from the beginning that in this struggle no quarter was to be given or asked. Failure meant annihilation. Those who took the plunge staked their all: they either got freedom or the gallows. It is, therefore, quite natural that several powerful princes should hesitate before playing for such high stakes. If the events had gone otherwise, and had proved favourable to those who had risen, there is not the slightest doubt that all the princes and chieftains who had been watching the developments would have joined, and helped in hastening the final success. But owing to several reasons, which will be examined later, it soon became clear, after the first three or four months of the struggle, that the movement held little promise of success. All honour to those who, in spite of the apparent danger, and the desperate nature of the movement, still took the plunge and cast their all into this supreme effort. The very prodigality of their heroism has enshrined them in our annals. We cannot but be thrilled by the valour of the Rani of Ramgarh, and the inspiring heroism of Rani Laxmi Bai, who knowing the inevitability of disaster, threw themselves into the battle. Those who stayed back from the movement counting the cost, exhibited a calculating prudence which is only too human a trait. But this does not make

the movement itself any the less national. If the leaders of the uprising had been fortunate enough to win some decisive triumphs against the British forces and establish themselves at a few places, the effect of these successes would have been so great, the public enthusiasm would have been so overwhelming, that it would have swept everyone—the willing and the hesitating—into the torrent, and driven the foreign power beyond the shores of our country. But that was not to be.

It could be argued that the 1857 outbreak did not have the quality of a mass movement. How, indeed, can there be a mass movement in that age? When the British conquered India, it was not with the help of the masses; the people in the beginning were just so many passive spectators. The British recruited an army of Sepoys, and it was with the help of this army that they overran Bengal, Carnatic, Maratha territory and the North. The active elements in the country had enlisted themselves in the British army, and had been used by the conquerors against the native rulers, such as, the Peshwa, Sindhia, Holkar, Jhansi and the Rulers of Oudh. What can be more significant, what evidence more conclusive of the essential wrongness of the foreign rule, than that these very men, who had joined in the wars against the Indian princes, now preferred to join the dispossessed princes against the British? This *volte face* of the Sepoys, who after all, were the most energetic elements among the common people, was the only form of people's participation in the 1857 movement possible at the time. We have to wait for more than fifty years before a real mass movement could take place. The 1857 struggle was undoubtedly confined to certain classes of persons who, however, had the support of the masses.

The years immediately following 1853 were years of gathering storm, when "the cloud at first no bigger than a man's hand", quickly grew to overcast the whole sky. Discontent had not only increased among the feudal and land-owning classes, it had also spread among the troops. It is significant that practically the entire Bengal Army consisted of Sepoys from Oudh and Agra provinces—the region where the disinheritance of Zamindars and Taluqdars was carried out most widely. The conditions of service in the army had deteriorated. They were sent on campaigns even outside the country, and their emoluments were cut down. England's many wars outside the shores of India, such as the Crimean War, the Chinese War, the Persian War, depleted the Indian army of many able and experienced British officers, with the result that just before 1857 there were in the entire army only 40,000 Europeans as against 311,000 Indian soldiers. Many of the officers left behind in India had neither the efficiency nor the will to enforce discipline. They



were mostly worn-out, superannuated men, who could not handle the soldiers with sympathy and understanding, with the result that the discontent of the Sepoys quickly increased, fanned by every little act of callousness or ill-treatment.\*

Nana Saheb, the dispossessed landlords of Oudh, the Rani of Jhansi and all potential leaders of the resistance movement knew the state of the Sepoys' feelings, and it gave them the hope that with the aid of the troops they would be able to lead the movement to success. It might be useful at this stage to recapitulate the names of those persons who were actively engaged in planning the rising against the British, and who could supply the effective leadership when the revolt broke out. The names of Nana Saheb and the Rani of Jhansi have been already mentioned. Among the dispossessed chieftains of Oudh the most prominent was Ahmadullah, the "Maulvi of Faizabad" as he was called, the adviser of the former king of Oudh. Then there was Rao Saheb, the nephew of Nana Saheb and grandson of the late Peshwa, Baji Rao. Tatyasaheb and Azimullah Khan were the followers of Nana Saheb who stood by him and carried on the struggle. There was the old Rajput chieftain, Kunwar Singh, whose estates had been lost owing to the injustice and severity of the Board of Revenue; and there was also Firoz Shah, a kinsman of the shadowy Moghal Emperor, Bahadur Shah.

It is significant that in the 1857 movement both Hindus and Muslims fought side by side. Although the brunt of the British conquest had fallen upon the Maratha kingdoms, the Muslims also had suffered considerably. But it should be remembered that the Muslims had previously lost much to the growing power of Sindhia, Holkar and the Peshwa. Yet, in the struggle of 1857, they preferred to join the Hindu leaders—Nana Saheb Peshwa, Rani of Jhansi, Tatyasaheb and others—in the fight against the British, because they recognised that the foreign foe was the greatest danger to the country. For many decades thereafter the two communities continued to fight side by side until at last the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' succeeded in dividing them permanently.

\*Lord Dalhousie wrote in 1851.

"Commanding officers are inefficient; Brigadiers are no better; divisional officers are worse than either because older and more done; and at the top of all they send a Commander-in-Chief seventy years old."

Lord Roberts also wrote in similar terms :

"Brigadiers of seventy, Colonels of sixty and Captains of fifty. It is curious to note how nearly every military officer who held a command or a high position on the staff in Bengal when the mutiny broke out, disappeared from the scene in the first few weeks and was never heard of officially again."

It appears probable that the actual outbreak took place sooner than was originally intended. The introduction of the new type of Enfield rifle with cartridges covered with grease made of cow or pig fat, the top of which had to be bitten off before it is used, provided the spark that set aflame a sullen and discontented army which was already on the verge of revolt. "On this inflammable material" writes Atchison, "the too true story of the cartridges fell as a spark on dry timber."

The first sign of unrest occurred a few months before the actual beginning of the revolt. On 29th March considerable agitation rose among the Sepoys of the 34th Regiment at Barrackpur. They saw their companions of the 19th Regiment being brought and disbanded because they had refused to accept the cartridges. There were rumours that European troops in large numbers were being landed. They feared that their religious sentiments against the use of the cartridges would be forcibly violated. In this state of excitement, a young Sepoy of the 35th Regiment, Mangal Pande, a recruit from a village in Oudh, seized his musket, called his comrades to join him, walked up to the Quarter Guard, and when the Adjutant came out, shot him at close range. Mangal Pande was soon overpowered. He did not succeed in his attempt to shoot himself. He was court-martialled and executed on 8th April. About a month later the conflagration began at Meerut. This incident at Barrackpur appears to have suddenly touched off the movement a little prematurely. When the news of it reached Meerut, it was taken as the signal for the outbreak. The view of Sir James Outram that the cartridge affair "precipitated the Mutiny before it had been thoroughly organised" appears to be supported not only by the timing of the incident but by subsequent events.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE GREAT UPRISING

The Nagpur and Sagar-Narmada territories were swept by the waves of the uprising, only a month after it had flooded the Meerut-Delhi area. The first incidents that occurred there are sufficiently well-known. On Saturday, May 9, 1857, the troopers of the 3rd Cavalry refused to use the new cartridges. They were promptly court-martialled, and eighty-five troopers were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. The pent-up fury of the troops burst in flames on Sunday, May 10th, when the three Indian regiments which were stationed in Meerut shot their officers, broke open the Jail, released their companions and set forth on the road to Delhi, about thirty miles away. On their way, others joined them in large numbers—sepoys, disbanded soldiers and civilians. They marched to the palace and proclaimed the aged Bahadur Shah, Emperor of India. The regiments in Delhi followed the example of the Meerut sepoys, killed their officers and joined in the general massacre of foreigners in Delhi. They captured the fort, the treasury and the magazine. The initial stages of the outbreak brought remarkable success to the insurgents. Within twenty-four hours of the outbreak, Delhi was completely in their possession; and Bahadur Shah issued a proclamation exhorting the Indian people of all ranks to join the movement to free India from the foreign rule.

In spite of the inadequate means of communication, the sensational news of the happenings in Meerut and Delhi reached the Nagpur and Sagar-Narmada territories by the middle of May. In times of anxiety and disturbance, rumour spreads wild and people are willing to believe anything they hear. Even early in May, stories were current in Sagar, Damoh and Jabalpur that the *ghee*, *atta* and sugar had been adulterated by Government's orders by pig's and cow's blood and bone-dust (Erskine's Narrative). The news of the events at Delhi and Meerut reached Sagar and Jabalpur on 17th May—a week after they had occurred. But till the end of the month, though there was much anxiety on the part both of the Europeans and the sepoys, nothing occurred in any of these areas. But with the beginning of June, events began to happen in quick succession. Meanwhile, the whole region from the Sutlej to the Ganges had been aflame. First Lucknow, then Cawnpore, the seat of Nana Sahib, and then Jhansi—at each place the events were similar. The troops rose against the European officers, either murdered them or held them at bay in their places of refuge.

Nagpur heard these events with great interest. Among the troops there was both exhilaration and some anxiety. They thought that as a precaution they might be disarmed. The regiment at Kamptee was not affected by the news, but the irregular cavalry which was posted at Takli, about three miles from Nagpur, was much agitated. Many of them were Muslims and had old associations with influential families which had held high offices under the Bhonsla Kings. They had also been recently upset about the Government's proposal to shift their burial place from the precincts of the city to a place outside. The plot, thus, appears to have been hatched between the Irregular Cavalry at Takli and the civilian people of the city. It was decided that on the midnight of the 13th June the people in the city were to send up a fire-balloon from somewhere near Motibagh garden, and at that signal the Irregular Cavalry was to gallop from Takli, join the citizens, and then jointly attack the Residency.

But, as it turned out, the plan failed to work. An orderly of Captain Woods whispered to his master that he had heard of something going on among the troops at Takli. One Faiz Bux, the parent of a student of the missionary, Stephen Hislop, also had heard some rumours which he conveyed to the master. The daroga of the jail, while returning home, had overheard some passers-by on the road talking about a plot, and he dutifully informed the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the jail. The news reached the Commissioner, Mr. Plowden, from all these sources. It was 10 o'clock at night, and the appointed time was only two hours from then. A company of the Regiment at Sitabuldi fort was immediately ordered into the city. The Irregular Cavalry at Takli realised that their plot had become known, and the game was up. They dispersed in the night and gave up all idea of carrying out their plans.

But the matter did not end there. Major Arrow, who was in command of the force, ordered them to turn out on parade without arms, and endeavoured by every means in his power to induce them to give up the ring-leaders, and to name those who had been saddling their horses. But neither threat nor coercion had any effect and the troops refused to divulge any name. The men were thereupon disarmed, and a proclamation was issued by the Commissioner restricting the bearing of arms and calling upon all persons, not duly authorised, to deposit their arms with the authorities. Both in Nagpur and Kamptee, large quantities of arms—numbering over 5,000—were collected as a result of these orders. The information, which the British authorities obtained by various means during the course of the next few days, led to the arrest of Dildar Khan,

Dafadar of the army, who had been doing emissary duty, while the plot was being hatched. He was tried and executed in the presence of the people of the town. On the basis of similar information, nearly 20 persons from the Irregular Cavalry were brought to trial. Three of them, Inayatulla Khan, Wilayat Khan and Nawab Kadar Khan were executed, while nine others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The authorities strengthened the Sitabuldi hill and stationed regular troops in the fort to be in readiness for any emergency. The utmost vigilance prevailed throughout the city and the Cantonment of Kamptee for several days subsequent to the detection of the plot, but no further serious trouble took place.

The absence of any prominent members of the Bhonsla family and their supporters in the attempt to rise against the British at Nagpur appears to be largely due to the attitude adopted by the aged Rani Bakabai who was the most influential member of the house, and a person carrying great influence with the people of the State. It would appear that a large and important section of the people who were aware of the distress and privations to which the dependents and relatives of the late Raja had been reduced, contemplated organising a revolt in the name of the adopted prince, Janoji Bhonsle. The situation in Nagpur, in fact, was highly favourable for such a revolt. The unjustified annexation, the callous treatment accorded to the Ranis, the unrest among the troops—all these provided a very favourable background for a popular uprising. If only Rani Bakabai had, as the Rani of Jhansi did, given her word of approval and implicit encouragement, she could have raised the whole of the Deccan, from Nagpur to Hyderabad and Satara, against the British. The temper of the time could well be imagined from the uneasy symptoms that appeared in various parts of the Deccan—at Poona, Satara, Kolhapur and other places. There is not the slightest doubt that many influential persons in Nagpur were quite prepared to cast their lot in a desperate revolt against the British power.

These persons had secured the co-operation of the Irregular Cavalry at Nagpur and they had even established contact with the Madras troops at Kamptee. If only Bakabai with all the authority of royalty, tradition and prestige, had entered the field and raised her banner, it is undoubtedly certain that an immense force would have gathered round her. It would have been very easy for them to have enacted in Sitabuldi and the Residency at Nagpur the same violent drama that occurred in Delhi, Cawnpore and Lucknow. If a rising of this nature had been successful at Nagpur, the storm would have immediately swept to Hyderabad where

they were only waiting for the movements of the troops in Kamptee. With the Madras army at Nagpur and Hyderabad up-in-arms, the uprising would have inevitably spread to Satara, Belgaum and Kolhapur in the west and the Arcot in the south. The Deccan and the Carnatic would have shaken off the British power. All these are not idle speculations. There was every evidence that trouble was brewing among the troops in Nagpur. It only needed the inspiring lead by a person like Rani Bakabai. But she who through 50 years of fluctuating fortunes had upheld the authority and rule of the Nagpur territories, set her face against any such action. To the leaders of the community in Nagpur who came to sound her views, she gave a firm and resolute command never to attempt such a foolhardy action. As the Deputy Commissioner Ellis says in his report :

"She summoned all the relations, Brahmin Sardars, Maratha and Mussalman, altogether between 400 and 500 persons, and threatened them with her sincerest displeasure and denounced against them the certain vengeance of heaven if any of them appeared to put themselves in opposition to government, or to conceal any treasonable proceedings."

He goes on to elaborate the great obligation under which the British had been placed by this loyal attitude of the Rani—an obligation which the British later repaid in a most callous manner. Ellis says:

"the heavy debt which the empire owes her for this eminent service renders it most painful, after describing the excellent conduct of this venerable lady, to have to detail the extraordinary neglect which the Ranis of the late Raja and their adopted son, Janoji Bhonsle, have experienced at the hands of the British authorities."

Thus, the incipient effort to raise the standard of revolt in Nagpur was put down. But the flames raged violently in the northern parts of this area, especially in the Sagar-Narmada territory. These areas had always been, as mentioned earlier, in a state of restless independence. It will be recalled that, during the rising of 1842-43, the Thakurs of this region had almost succeeded in eliminating the British rule. Since then there had been only a kind of uneasy peace, but no tranquillity, in these districts. An important step in the administration of these districts was taken as a result of the Bundela rising of 1842. The Sagar-Narmada Territories were joined to the North-Western Provinces to be administered under the Lieutenant-Governor of Agra and the Sadar Board of Revenue. Major Erskine was appointed Commissioner for these territories and was posted at Jabalpur.

BUNDELKHAND

REWA

SHARGARH  
MULTON  
MURAI  
SAUGOR  
RAHATGARH  
PHUTENA  
DAMOH  
HINDORH  
BALAKOTE  
SURNAKOTA

DEORI  
DHILWAR  
MADANPUR  
JUBULPUR  
BARETA  
KATANGI

BHOPAL

INDORE  
NIMAR  
BERAR

NAGPUR PROVINCE

NAGPUR PROVINCE

NARAYANGAU  
MANDLA  
SHUGRI  
RANGARH  
BACHHA

SAUGOR & NERBUDDA  
TERRITORIES  
IN  
1857-58

MOHAMMABAD  
SONHAPUR  
ACHHAPUR  
BETUL  
MURTAI  
HARDA





The news of the revolt in Jhansi reached Sagar on 8th June, and with it came also the report that the Raja of Banpur had gathered a large body of men at Lalitpur. At the same time it was reported that the Raja of Shahgarh, whose principality lies on the north and west of Damoh and Sagar districts, was raising soldiers with the intention of making war on the British. Within a few days it appeared that the whole area, north of Narmada, was in arms. The Raja of Banpur had seized Lalitpur and imprisoned all the Europeans. The detachment sent from Sagar for the relief of Lalitpur under Major Gausson could not proceed beyond Malthone, as the passes to the north were all held by large bodies of the Raja's troops. Messages passed between the Raja's men and the sepoys in Major Gausson's detachment, and on 25th June, the latter broke out into open defiance. Meanwhile, the British officers and ladies imprisoned by the Raja of Banpur at Lalitpur were permitted to go to Sagar, but on their way, they were seized and imprisoned by the Raja of Shahgarh. After keeping the prisoners for nearly three months, they were allowed to go to Sagar where they arrived in a most exhausted condition. It is, however, noteworthy that in none of these places were the Britishers murdered indiscriminately.

The position in Sagar meanwhile was none too easy. Brigadier Sage, who was commanding the troops at Sagar, feared that trouble might break out at any moment, and decided to fortify and defend the old fort in the town. He felt it was most important that this fort should not fall into the hands of the insurgents because apart from the arsenal and large stores it contained, it was the only place where the European and Christian residents could find safety against an armed attack. The expected uprising came on the morning of 1st July when the Irregular Cavalry stationed at Sagar rose in revolt. At the same time Sheik Ramzan, the senior Subhedar of the 42nd Infantry, raised the Mohamadan flag and invited his followers by beat of drums to join him. Several other regiments joined in the uprising. They went round the Sadar Bazar and the Cantonment of the town, plundering the residences of officers. They did not set fire to the houses, nor were any foreigners killed. The next day, a part of these insurgents marched towards Damoh, while the remaining forces stayed in Sagar, relieved the troops halting at Malthone, and declared Sheik Ramzan their General. The part of the forces that went to Damoh reached there on July 4, only to find that all the officers, with one lady who was with them, had fled to Narsimhapur. It would appear that the Deputy Commissioner of Damoh had at first intended to move the whole treasury into the Jail Fort and take up a safe defensive position in the Fort.

But at the last minute he began to be doubtful about the dependability of the Indian troops who were to protect the Fort. They belonged to the same corps that had risen in Sagar. Therefore, the officers accompanied by the lady suddenly left Damoh, very quietly in the night, "with nothing but the clothes on their backs". They travelled the seventy miles to Narsimhapur in that condition, reaching there safely, though worn out by hunger and the rain. Their nervousness about staying in the Damoh fort, however, proved to be wholly unjustified, because the troops who held the fort did not join the insurgents who reached Damoh from Sagar. They defended the treasury and would not give it up, whereupon the insurgent forces left the town without committing any violence. It is clear that the charges of indiscriminate cruelty made by British historians against the men who rose against the British are not valid everywhere. At any rate, the smooth and rapid manner in which, in town after town in the Sagar-Narmada territories, the ruling power was displaced by either the Thakurs and Rajahs of the place or by the insurgent troops indicates a very different state of affairs. It is obvious that between the old aristocracy of this region, consisting of those very Bundela Rajputs, Gonds and Lodhis, who had risen against the British in 1842, and the native troops who revolted against the officers, there was a close communication and understanding. The result was that within about two months of the rising in Sagar, the whole area was in the hands of the freedom army.

The situation in Jabalpur, in the meanwhile, was one of more anxiety and less action. Ever since an incident, which proved to be an isolated one, occurred on 15th June, the European officers and men lived in panic. On the 15th, while the Adjutant was inspecting the guards of his regiment, a sepoy in the ranks, who probably had become unbalanced and excited on hearing the news from Jhansi, charged at the Adjutant with his musket causing him only a scratch. The sepoy was overpowered and confined in the guard-room. On examination by the medical officer later, the sepoy was found to be insane, and was sent to the asylum at Benares. It transpired, however, that at Benares, owing, perhaps, to the hysterical mood created by Colonel Neill's atrocities, the sepoy was pronounced to be not mad, and he was hanged. But the incident itself caused much panic among the Europeans in Jabalpur. Rumours were current that some of the Thakurs and chieftains were about to rise and join the sepoys against the British. They expected that the insurgent forces that had reached Damoh from Sagar would proceed to Jabalpur. It was decided to collect all the European and Christian women and children in the town and all

officers inside the residence of the Commissioner which could be blockaded and made defensible. Major Erskine, the Commissioner, describes how that night forty-five adults of whom ten were ladies, and fifteen children sat down to dinner in his hall, while the sergeants and other civilians by turns stood sentry all round the house. He says :

“Doubtless that night was one of no small danger to the Europeans of Jabalpur, for a section of determined men might have shot us all from the large hall door as we sat at dinner.”

But the expected shots did not come, and all through the night and the next day, they made themselves busy filling bags and boxes with sand to erect a barricade, while the ladies employed themselves in making powder bags. All this feverish activity actually served only one good purpose : they were able to sit down to dinner with good appetites. The expected attack did not come.

The position in Damoh district was quite different. This district, as well as Sagar, was completely in the hands of the insurgent forces. The Lodhi chieftains of Damoh had all joined the Shahgarh insurgents. They were also armed with guns made by them. All the police forces in the districts had either joined in the rising or had deserted. Hundreds of malguzars assisted the insurgents with men and food. For many weeks, no *daks* were received either at Sagar or Damoh. Communications were completely disrupted for days together. The old trouble spots of Chawarpartha and Tendukhera again got out of hand. Thus, in the month of August 1857, practically all places to the north of Narmada, except Jabalpur and Mandla, were in the possession of the freedom forces.

Events, however, came crowding soon at Jabalpur. The anxious preparations which the Commissioner and the European officers had made for their defence were not in vain. Throughout the month of August the Thakurs and Malguzars of the district had been ready for an uprising, and were only waiting for a move from the army. Early in September there were evidences that some of the ring-leaders among the sepoys were planning to take action. The arrival of a mobile column with European gunners from Kamptee was resented by some of the troops in Jabalpur. The discontented sepoys found an inspiring leader in a representative of an ancient dynasty of rulers, Raja Shankar Shah. He belonged to the well-known Gond royal family of Garhamandla, one of whose ancestors, the chivalrous Rani Durgavati, covered herself with glory in fighting for her kingdom's independence against the Mughal army in 16th century.

Raja Shankar Shah was then a pensioner, having under him about three Jagir villages, and he lived at Purwa, a suburb of Jabalpur. Several sepoys from the Regiment at Jabalpur used to visit him at his house and discuss about the events happening at Sagar, Damoh and other places. The news of the terrible incidents happening at Cawnpur, Lucknow and Delhi also reached them and deeply agitated them. They were indignant against the foreign rulers, and mediated an attack upon the cantonment in sympathy with the risings in other parts of the country. The plan appeared to be to collect a sufficient force with the aid of other Thakurs and Zamindars, and the sepoys of the army, and march against the cantonment on the first day of Moharrum.

Before the appointed day, however, information about this plot leaked out to Captain Clerk, the Deputy Commissioner. Accompanied by his Assistant, twenty sawars and forty policemen he raided the house of Raja Shankar Shah on 14th September, arrested the Raja and his son Raghunath Shah and some others found in the house, and locked them up in prison. This infuriated the 52nd Regiment, several sepoys from which had been frequenting the Raja's house and were parties to the plan. The day after the arrest, the sepoys made an effort to rescue the prisoners. Shots were heard in the lines at night, and a house nearby was set on fire. The Commissioner called out the mobile column so that it may be in readiness. Further, in order to render any rescue impossible, the next day he went through a farce of trying the Raja and his son. The trying Commission, consisting of the Deputy Commissioner and two British officers, did not have any difficulty in finding these two princes guilty of high treason. The following morning the two prisoners were executed in the novel way that had become fashionable during the Great Revolt—they were tied to the mouths of guns and were blown up.\*

That Shanker Shah devoutly wished and prayed for the extermination of the British from India is quite clear. After his arrest when his house was searched by the Deputy Commissioner

\*Explaining why this mode of execution was adopted, the Deputy Commissioner, Jabalpur, says :

"This mode of execution was adopted in preference to hanging for the following reasons :—

Some excitement prevailed in the lines of the 52nd and a rescue might have been attempted. It would have taken some time to put up the gallows and it would have been necessary for a large portion of the Madras force to have attended on the spot at a distance from the residence. It was considered the most expeditious and safest way of carrying out this."

he found among his papers a copy of the proclamation issued by the Commissioner calling on all chieftains to be loyal.\* On the back of this sheet of paper, the Raja had written a prayer composed by him, invoking the Goddess to destroy the Europeans. This was the prayer:

मुंद मुख डंडिन की चुगली को चबाई खाई  
 खुद डीर दुष्टन को शत्रु—  
 संधारका मार अंगरैज रेज कर देइ मात  
 चंडी बचै नही बैरि—  
 बाल बच्चै संधारका संकर की रक्षा कर  
 दास प्रतिपाल कर दीन की  
 सुन आयमाल हालका खायइ लै  
 मलैछन को झेल नाही  
 करो अब भक्षण कर ततछन घोर—  
 मत-कालिका ॥१॥

The poem has been freely translated into English by the Commissioner of Jabalpur, at that time, Mr. Erskine, and runs as follows:—

Shut the mouth of slanderers, bite and eat up backbiters, trample down the sinners, you, "Shatrusanharaka" (one of the names of "Devee", implying here destroyer of the enemy).

Kill the British, exterminate them, "Mata Chandee" (another of the names of the Goddess "Devee").

Let not the enemy escape, nor the wives and children of such, Oh! "Sanharaka" (another of the Goddess "Devee's" names).

Show favour to Shankar,

Support your slave,

Listen to the cry of religion,

"Mathalka" (another of the Goddess "Devee's" names).

Eat up the unclean,

Make no delay.

Now devour them,

And that quickly,

"Ghormat Kalika" (another of the Goddess "Devee's" names).

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\*Reporting the seizure of Shankar Shah's papers. The Deputy Commissioner of Jabalpur writes to Major Erskine, Commissioner, Sagar Division, on 19th September 1856:

"On searching Shankar Shah's and Raghunath Shah's house, several papers of a rebellious tendency were found one in particular, a copy of which is annexed to this letter. It is a prayer invoking his deity to aid him in the destruction of all Europeans, to upset our Government and re-establish his own. The paper was found in a silk bag in which he kept Pawa by the bed from which he rose as I entered his house.....it appears to be in the handwriting of Raghunath Shah."

The brutal execution of Raja Shankar Shah shocked the people and the troops who followed him. On the night of the execution, the entire 52nd Regiment rose quickly in a body and left the station, carrying with them their arms and ammunition. They marched by a circuitous route outside the city towards Patan where a detachment of the same regiment was stationed. Another detachment of the Regiment was at Sleemanabad. The news of the revolt of the 52nd Regiment reached both these places, and the troops there also rose against their officers and marched to join their companions coming from Jabalpur. The conduct of these insurgent troops of the 52nd is conspicuous for its dignity and high sense of honour. Even, when they defied their English officers, they did not resort to any act of violence or mass murders, but firmly and quietly asked the officers to quit. There were two officers with the detachment at Sleemanabad, Lieutenants Barton and Cockburn. When the troops under them had decided to rise against the Government, they "expressed their regret at parting with these officers and did not molest them. Some of them shook their officers by the hand, and the Pay Havildar handed one of the officers the balance of his pay, and marched off quickly towards Nagode. The two officers safely reached Jabalpur while the men obtained a carriage and sent the officers' baggage to Jabalpur after them". (Erskine's *Narrative*). Again and again it has been found that the leaders of the uprising showed great forbearance towards the Britishers who had fallen into their hands, and there were very few violent murders of the captives. The Englishmen, women and children seized by the Raja of Banpur at Lalitpur were kept in custody for some time by him, and later they were imprisoned by the Raja of Shahgarh, who, some months later, released them and sent them to Sagar. While they no doubt underwent privations during their confinement, they were never in danger of losing their lives. This singular treatment of British captives by the local leaders of the uprising in these territories redounds to their credit, and provides a sharp contrast to the fate that befell the captured insurgents at the hands of the Britishers.

Next month, that is, in October 1857, the rising spread further into Hoshangabad, Mandla and even a little to the south of the Narmada. The insurgents of the 52nd Regiment captured Damoh, burnt the records and public buildings there, but did not destroy the Deputy Commissioner's house, "owing probably to its belonging to a native." The district was, thus, practically in the possession of the insurgents. From Damoh they got into contact with the Shahgarh insurgents at Gurha Kotah. To the south of the Narmada the tahsil of Bargi was captured, and some of the Thākurs

of Seoni were found to be restive, so that the Deputy Commissioner thought it prudent to call them and speak to them firmly. He also moved a contingent to Dhooma, so that it could be employed against the resisters at Bargi if necessary.

One of the outstanding leaders of the resistance movement in Jabalpur district was the young and valiant Thakur Surju Prasad, of Bijairaghogarh. This great family traced their lineage from the princely house of Jaipur, and Bijairaghogarh once formed part of the estate of Maihar. On the death of Thakur Durjan Singh of Maihar in 1826, the property was divided between his two sons, Bishnu Singh taking Maihar and Pragdas Singh the estate of Bijairaghogarh. By a sanad, dated 29th February 1828, the British Government recognised Thakur Pragdas Singh as Chief of Bijairaghogarh. For about nineteen years he conducted the affairs of the estate with great success and introduced many useful reforms. According to the Settlement Report of Jabalpur District of 1869, his State was considered during his time a flourishing place, having an efficient and benevolent administration. Pragdas Singh died in 1845 and was succeeded by his son young Surju Prasad Singh, who was then only a boy of five years. The Government, therefore, took over charge of the minor chief and brought the State under the management of the Court of Wards. Thus, when the great uprising took place in the country, Thakur Surju Prasad Singh was a youth of about seventeen years and his estate was still managed by the Deputy Commissioner of Jabalpur.

Towards the end of October 1857, when the events that had recently happened in Jabalpur following the execution of Raja Shankar Shah had been agitating the public mind, young Thakur Surju Prasad, as yet a ward under the Government, rose in revolt. The Tahsildar was killed, the *dak* horses were captured, and large bodies of armed men covered the important Jabalpur-Mirzapur road, so that neither *dak* nor travellers could pass along that road. The young leader of this resistance front distinguished himself by many acts of daring and gallantry. Erskine, the Commissioner, reports in November that "The Bijairaghogarh rebels remained in great force on the Deccan or Mirzapur road and completely cut off the direct communication between north-west and Calcutta and Bombay. Not a soul could pass, and all who attempted it were searched and plundered, some killed and others mutilated." It was not before January next year (1858), when the Rewa troops were ordered to Maihar, that the British could move their troops against Bijairaghogarh and capture it. Surju Prasad managed to escape, and wandered about disguised as a faqir.



For the sake of completeness, the subsequent events concerning this brave Thakur may be narrated here. The British succeeded in capturing him in 1864, and took him to Jabalpur where he remained in confinement for a long time. He was then tried for rebellion and other hostile acts among which, in particular, was his being accessory in the murder of the Tahsildar Mir Sabit Ali. They found all the charges fully proved, and he was sentenced to transportation for life and forfeiture of all his property. Rather than face this sentence, Surju Prasad committed suicide, and may thus be considered one of the early martyrs in the struggle for freedom. The territories of Bijairaghogarh were confiscated and formed a part of the Murwara tahsil of Jabalpur district.

In November 1857, the district of Mandla had practically gone out of the hands of the British. In the town of Mandla itself a large force consisting of local chieftains and their followers gathered in the streets, and the Deputy Commissioner finding his ammunition falling short, and his retreat to Jabalpur cut off, decided to fall back on Seoni. He effected a junction with the Deputy Commissioner of Seoni at Dhuma where action against the insurgents under Bahadur Singh and Devi Singh was being organised.

One of the heroic characters in the freedom movement in Mandla district is the Rani of Ramgarh. Though less famous than the great ruler of Jhansi, she exhibited a love of her land and a desperate valour which should win for her a place among the great warrior-women of our country. Ramgarh is a small town situated among the hills of Mandla district where an ancient Rajput chieftain under the Rajas of Garhamandla ruled his small estate of about a few hundred villages. The last of the Ramgarh Rajas was Lacchman Singh who died in 1850 leaving his only son Vikramjit Singh as heir. Vikramjit was mentally unsound and was considered unfit to manage the estate. The British Government, therefore, took over the management of the estate and appointed a Tahsildar, allowing an annual grant for the maintenance of the Raja and his family. This was all the more highhanded because, in the Rani of Ramgarh, the wife of Raja Lacchman Singh, there was a lady of great ability and knowledge who could have administered the estate in the name of her son, if not in the name of her husband. All her protests were in vain, because the policy of annexation was in full play at the time. But the Rani was not a person to submit meekly. When she found her protests unavailing, she took the law into her hands, removed from Ramgarh the Tahsildar appointed by the British, and took the Government of her estate in her own hands. It was soon after this that she heard of the cruel execution of Raja Shankar Shah at Jabalpur,

the last representative of the Royal house of Garhamandla, to whom Ramgarh estate owed its very existence. The injustice which she herself had suffered appeared less gross than what had happened to the scion of the Garhamandla kings. She promptly got in touch with the Thakurs and Malguzars in the district. Why not take up arms and defy the British instead of bearing such injustice? The Commissioner of Jabalpur had heard of these activities on 26th August 1857. He, therefore, asked the Raja, the Rani and their son to see the Deputy Commissioner of Mandla within three days of receiving the order. The Rani, naturally refused to obey the order. She fortified Ramgarh by erecting barricades, and augmented her forces so as to be ready for any emergency. She herself used to lead her men on the field of battle, clad in full military dress, armed with a sword. She was promised support by several neighbouring Zamindars.

On April 1, 1858, the Mandla force advanced towards Ramgarh. Lieutenant Barton who commanded the party made a dash at the place from two sides. The Rani and her forces could not hold on, and had to evacuate the town. They retired into the neighbouring jungles from where she carried on persistent raids on the British camp. But one such raid proved fatal. She found herself surrounded, and capture appeared imminent. True to the tradition of heroic women, she preferred death to capture, and suddenly dismounting from her horse, she seized the sword from her attendant's hands and plunged it into her body. When the British arrived she was almost dying. The Civil Surgeon tried hard to revive her, but her spirit could not be confined any more. The captors could take with them only her lifeless body. Like her own famous ancestor, Rani Durgawati, she met with a heroic death on the battlefield, defending her freedom to the last.

Ramgarh was among the last resistance centres to fall in Mandla district. Earlier in the year, the Deputy Commissioner of Mandla, who had retreated to Seoni, returned to the district with reinforcements, after he had helped his colleague at Seoni to put down the uprising there. The leaders, Bahadur Singh and Devi Singh, were captured and hanged. By the end of the year 1857, all disturbance south of the Narmada, round Seoni and Bargi had been quelled. Thus reinforced it was possible for the British to re-establish themselves in Mandla. The fall of Ramgarh was followed by the recapture of Shaipoora, whose Thakur was one of the bravest soldiers in the district, and of Sohagpur which the defenders evacuated and escaped into Rewa.

The affairs in Narsimhapur and Hoshangabad had also gone very favourably for the insurgents till the end of 1857. Narsim-

hapur district was threatened from three sides, on the north Nawab Ali Khan of Bhopal with a strong force of Pathans, matchlockmen and other followers rose against the British and attacked Tendukhera and Bilkaree. On the east Mirbhan Singh, the noted leader of resistance, moved to Heerapur only about fifteen miles from Narsimhapur; while on the west, the forces which had gathered in Bargi pargana of Jabalpur threatened south-western part of the district. The Deputy Commissioner Captain Ternan, who many months ago had noticed the circulation of the wheat cakes and had treated it with scorn, was now hard put to it to resist the forces of opposition which those innocent looking articles had released. He now attacked and dispersed Mirbhan Singh's forces at Heerapur, while Captain Wooley who assisted him, crossed the Sonar river and succeeded in routing the forces concentrated there. These two officers pressed forward into the region north of Narmada, in Narsimhapur district, and by the end of November 1857 were able to clear the place of all resistance.

The rising in Hoshangabad started early in October 1857 when a large following under Thakur Daulat Singh raised a revolt in Nemawar tahsil, and strongly entrenched themselves at Satwas. Although the British troops were able to push them out of the fort for a time, they again re-established themselves. It was only towards the end of January next year that Hoshangabad district was cleared of the insurgents.

It is noteworthy that the major centres of resistance in the Sagar-Narmada Territories were precisely those places which had risen against the British during the earlier attempt in 1842. Sagar itself, and Damoh, Narsimhapur, Chawarpatha, Tendukhera, Heerapur—these are well-known places where the Thakurs and Malguzars had refused to reconcile themselves to dependence and subordination fifteen years ago. They were now again in the forefront of opposition, in a final effort to assert their independence. The leaders of the former rising, like Dhilan Shah of Maddanpur, were prominent this time also; but in organisation they had still much to learn. Warriors of extraordinary courage and determination they undoubtedly were, but they wrecked themselves in isolated battles against the solid, well-organised troops of the British.

Towards the end of December 1857, Raipur district was in ferment and rumours of an impending rising were widespread. This area was specially suited for a revolt which, properly organised, could have enveloped the whole wild tract from Bhandara and Chanda in the west to the borders of Orissa and Bengal. As the

Commissioner of Nagpur says in his letter to Major General Whitlock, dated 23rd January 1858:

“A rebellion commenced in the Raipur district would certainly have spread to all the Zamindaries of the adjoining country to the east and north, and in all probability to the Bhandara and Chanda Zamindaries of this province to the west; and a rebellion dispersed over so vast, so difficult and so unhealthy a tract could not have been quelled without a large army and an enormous sacrifice of life.”

This appraisalment was not far from wrong. By December 1857, the uprising had not only reached the borders of Raipur district, but had infiltrated both from the north and east. In Sohagpur in the north, the insurgents were in a strong position and had sent messages to the Zamindars in Raipur to join them. The Sambalpur uprising in the east also threatened Raipur from that direction, and if they had succeeded in starting a movement within the district itself, there would surely have been a wholesale revolt throughout this area.

The unimaginative administration of the district surely favoured a revolt. As early as in August 1856, Narayan Singh, Zamindar of Sonakhan, during a season of acute scarcity had entered the grain store of a merchant in one of the villages in the district, taken from there just enough grain required by his cultivators and distributed it to them. He immediately wrote to the Deputy Commissioner about what he had done, and the considerations that prompted his action. At the same time, the merchant also complained to the Deputy Commissioner about his loss. Instead of handling this situation with sympathy, the Deputy Commissioner at once issued a warrant of arrest against the Zamindar, sent a party of police to his house, who after some difficulty brought him under custody to Raipur on a charge of plunder, and put him in jail.

For ten months he remained in jail, and when the Great Revolt began in May 1857, the people and troops in Raipur decided to make him the leader of resistance. In August 1857, very probably with the assistance of the 30th Regiment of Irregular Infantry, Narayan Singh and the other inmates escaped from jail. He took up his position in his own Zamindari, Sonakhan, where a contingent under Lieutenant Smith surrounded him. Finding resistance hopeless Narayan Singh surrendered and was once again brought to Raipur, tried and convicted for treason and rebellion, under the Atrocious Act XIV of 1857, and sentenced to death. On 19th December 1857, Narayan Singh was hanged in the presence of the troops and the public.

It is against this background that we have to see the incident that happened a month later in Raipur. The authorities had brutally hanged as a criminal an influential leader whose only offence was that he had relieved the famine among the cultivators by distributing the grain hoarded by a merchant, and had himself frankly informed the Deputy Commissioner about what he had done. It can be argued that he had done an act of public benefit, and the merchant could, if necessary, have been compensated. He had, in fact, done in a rather summary fashion what any decent government should have done in times of scarcity, namely, procure grain from wherever it is hoarded and distribute it to the needy. Instead of receiving public appreciation, Narayan Singh was hanged as a traitor.

On the night of 18th January 1858, at about 8 p.m., Sergeant-Major Sidwell of the 3rd Regiment was sitting in his room in the lines, and had just sent away his attendant, when Magazine Lascar Hanuman Singh, accompanied by two *golandazis* suddenly came into the room, fully armed, and while the latter guarded the door, Hanuman Singh attacked the Sergeant Major with his sword and mortally wounded him. The Sergeant Major died a little later. The three men then rushed to the Lines shouting to the men to join them in the rising. The Havildar and some sepoy of the Artillery seized the guns and primed them for action.

The rising was, however, short-lived. It failed owing to poor organisation. Lieutenant Rybot and Lieutenant Smith came to the Lines as soon as they heard of the outbreak, called up their men, and arrested the Artillery Havildar, fourteen privates and two sepoy of the 3rd Regiment. Lascar Hanuman Singh had, however, escaped; and although a reward was later proclaimed for his capture, dead or alive, they did not succeed in getting him. But vengeance was wreaked on the seventeen men who were arrested. They were publicly hanged, in the presence of the troops and the people of Raipur.

With the execution of these men, the rising in Raipur was put down. The district authorities frantically tried to obtain reinforcements from General Whitlock who was commanding at Kamptee. There is much recriminating correspondence on record between the Commissioner of Nagpur and the General, because of the latter's refusal to spare any men from under his Command for Raipur. Luckily for the British, an emergency requiring reinforcements did not arise in Raipur. It appears that the mass hanging of the men who, in fact, had committed no violence but had surrendered themselves, appears to have struck terror among the troops. As for the

other leaders of the resistance, although the people at Sambalpur and Sohagpur held out for some months, the counter-offensive launched by Sir Hugh Rose in the Sagar-Narmada Territory had begun to turn the tide in favour of the British ; but, not before one more effort was made by the landed aristocracy to overthrow the rulers—this time in the southernmost part of the Nagpur province.

The district of Chanda was largely covered by thick forests and was populated mainly by Gonds and Marias. There were several Zamindaries in the district owned by Raj-Gond families who were mostly related to the former royal family of Chanda. The fort of Chanda was one of the strongest fortresses in Nagpur territory and had stood out against the British in support of Appa Saheb before Colonel Adams and Colonel Scott captured it in 1818.

The Zamindars were still unreconciled to the loss of their independence consequent on the escheat of Nagpur. So, no sooner had the rising in Raipur been quelled, than two of the most important Zamindars of Chanda, Bapu Rao, Zamindar of Molampally, and Venkat Rao, Zamindar of Arpally, joined their forces and rose against the British. They collected a large force consisting of Gonds, Marias and Rohillas, and added to their resources by capturing the estates of some of the smaller landlords who were not agreeable to joining them.

It will be recalled that one of the contributions of Dalhousie to India was the telegraph communication. Even a good thing done by the author of the annexations was likely to be looked upon with suspicion. To the simple-minded people in the wild parts of our country, these endless wires running across the country appeared to be some diabolical device for binding the people in slavery. Thus, while a party of the Telegraph Department was working at a village called Chichgoonda in Aheri Zamindari, the men of Venkat Rao and Bapu Rao attacked them and killed two of the officers, Gastton and Hall. The third officer, Peter, escaped and fled to Chanda where he reported the incident to the Deputy Commissioner. Immediately the forces of the British began to move in the usual methodical manner. A contingent was sent to Aheri from Nagpur under Captain Shakespeare. The Deputy Commissioner sent an express letter through Peter to the Zamindarin Lakshmi Bai of Aheri asking her to apprehend the two insurgent leaders. The property of Gangadhar Kawalkar, the Diwan of Venkat Rao, was confiscated, merely on a suspicion that he may have helped his master. Captain Shakespeare raided Arpally and Ghote but did not find Venkat Rao there. The Zamindari was naturally seized. In his rage at not finding Venkat Rao, the Aheri Zamindarin was

warned that if she failed to apprehend Babu Rao and Venkat Rao, she would be prosecuted for harbouring and assisting the rebels, and her Zamindari would also be forfeited\*. The threat had the desired effect. In July 1858, the men of Lakshmi Bai succeeded in capturing Babu Rao at Bhopalpatnam, but while he was being taken to Ahiri in fetters he managed to escape, assisted by his guards who were Rohillas. This did not, however, avail him much, because he was captured again in September. He was tried and sentenced to death by the Deputy Commissioner, Chanda, and was hanged in Chanda jail.† Venkat Rao was still at large and efforts to capture him did not succeed. He went into Bastar and was still active long after the Great Revolt had been put down in all parts of India. In a letter, dated 11th March 1859, addressed to the Deputy Commissioner, it is stated :

“The fugitive Venkat Rao was routed and went off after remaining a few days in Jangam-Kurul, in the hills of the Ghote taluq. He proceeded to Prarappur in Raipur district. A few days ago rumour was heard to the effect that the said fugitive was collecting a force to attack Ahiri.”

For nearly two years Venkat Rao remained in Bastar trying to collect an army with a view to proceeding against Ahiri ; but this did not succeed. Ultimately in 1860, he was captured by the Raja of Bastar and handed over to the British. He was tried at Chanda by the Deputy Commissioner, and, perhaps due to the intervention of his mother Nagabai, he was sentenced not to death but to transportation for life. The Government handed over the villages in Venkat Rao's Zamindari of Arpally and Ghote to Lakshmi Bai of Ahiri as a reward for her services in arresting the leaders.

\*Plowden, Commissioner of Nagpur, writing to the Deputy Commissioner, Chanda, on 28th June 1858, expresses his annoyance against the Zamindarin of Ahiri for not capturing Venkat Rao :

“She cannot be allowed to go on dilly-dallying as she has been doing about delivering up Venkat Rao. She ought to have reported his capture and sent him up to you instantly. I hope, ere you receive this, that she will either have made him over to Lieutenant Nuttal, in obedience to your order, or brought him into Chanda and delivered him into your hands according to her own promise. If not it is necessary that you should take immediate and strong measures against herself and all her Kamdars at once..... They should be made to understand that they have, by their delay in delivering him up, already, incurred the guilt and penalty of harbouring rebels.”

†Plowden, Commissioner of Nagpur, writing to the Deputy Commissioner Chanda, on 26th April 1858, gives this peremptory order regarding the disposal of the rebels :

“All persons taken in arms against us should be hanged on the spot and also persons brought to trial before you for rebellion and convicted should be sentenced to death and hanged at once, in the absence of any extenuating circumstances to justify a more lenient sentence. The leaders specially should be dealt with with the utmost severity.”

At the tail end of the freedom movement of 1857, when the resistance in all parts of India was practically dying out, the exploits of these two chieftains of Chanda stand out like a bright flicker before the flame was put out. Many folk tales and songs about the valour of these two men are current in Telugu language, and are sung still among the people in remote villages of Chanda, like echoes down the corridors of history, reviving in our mind the picture of a dangerous and daring time, a hundred years ago.

A narrative of the events that occurred in these territories will not be complete without an account of the incidents that occurred in many parts of the northern districts, south of the Narmada, as a result of Taty Tope's presence. Taty Tope whose childhood years spent in the company of Nana Sahib and Rani Lakshmi Bai had bound the three of them in a bond of comradeship, was one of the brilliant military strategists that the War of Independence threw up in the country. Azimulla Khan records in his diary, as a proof of Taty Tope's attachment to the Peshwa family, that when the Peshwa died in 1851 he was so overcome with grief that he threw himself into the Ganges. He was luckily rescued, and lived to be a terror to the British armies. But here we are concerned with him in the evening of his wonderful career when he had been driven to desperate straits.

The great deeds performed by this General of Nana Sahib's army at Jhansi, Kalpi, Gwalior and other battles in the Northern Bundelkhand and Central India, do not form a part of this history. They constitute a bright, unforgettable chapter in the struggle for freedom outside Madhya Pradesh. For many months after the death of the Rani of Jhansi in June 1858, on the battlefield of Kotah-ki-Sarai near Gwalior, Taty Tope kept up a tireless guerilla warfare, evading the British pursuit all over Central India, keeping them always guessing what his next move would be. After the battle of Khurai in Sagar district, where he had lost one wing of his army, he found himself at bay in Central India and Bundelkhand and, therefore, accompanied by Rao Sahib, he crossed the Narmada into Nagpur territory, about forty miles above Hoshangabad. This was on 25th October 1858.

Referring to this significant arrival of a Mahratta General and his army in the territories of the Bhonslas, Malleon says that this movement of Taty Tope into Nagpur province "carried out twelve months earlier, would have produced an effect fatal, for the time, to British supremacy; a movement which would have roused the whole of the western presidency, have kindled revolt in the dominions of the Nizam, and have, in its working, penetrated to southern India." But now it was too late to stir up the leaders and



people who had been terrorised and subdued by an exhibition of force and merciless suppression, whose spirits had been shocked by mass hangings and executions, in which the innocent and the offender shared the same fate. Villages that had been burnt down, families rendered destitute by the execution of their bread-winners, fields and farmyards destroyed, could not now rise again in support of Taty Tope and his men. Yet, in spite of this despondency, when Taty crossed the Narmada, he was met by the Fatehpur Raja who presented him *nazar*, and conducted him to Fatehpur by a short-cut so as to evade the British troops lying in wait for him. He then went to the Mahadeo Hills where Bhabut Singh, the Zamindar of Harrahot, joined him, and thence he reached Multai on 5th November. By now he had with him an army of about four thousand men. It was, however, a disappointment to him that his comrade-in-arms, the Nawab of Banda, had chosen to accept the amnesty contained in the Proclamation by the Governor-General on behalf of Queen Victoria. Taty and Rao Saheb tried to dissuade him from taking this step, but with no success. On 9th November 1858, the Nawab made an application, offering the surrender of himself, his wife and children and all his followers.

Taty Tope now proceeded to Bhainsdehi and then entered the Nimar district crossing the Satpura ranges, and reached Khandwa. He found his progress impeded in all directions: Sir Hugh Rose preventing his advance into Khandesh, and General Roberts cutting him off from Gujrat. A small force was also moving towards him from Achalpur, in order to see that he did not enter Berar.

It would appear that the condition of Taty's army—if army it may be called—was most distressing. By a fortunate coincidence, an account of the hardships suffered by the followers of Taty as narrated by one of them, one Mahimji Wadhi of Yeotmal, has survived. He says they had run through their ammunition, provisions and money. It appeared that the cause was lost. In this state, one day Taty called his men and said to them :

"Today we have no strength to fight the English ; we are reduced in men and material. So we have to hide underground till we regain our strength. Only those who are prepared to face this situation, at the risk of their lives, should remain with me ; others should seek whatever shelter they can."

Many left the camp and returned to their homes. Others stuck loyally to their leader, determined to follow him to the end.

It is not necessary to trace in detail the course of Taty Tope from Khandwa onwards. Finding himself surrounded on all side, he crossed the Tapti and proceeded towards Baroda, and thus left

the territories of Madhya Pradesh. His last days were embittered by the desertion of companions and the final betrayal by his trusted colleague. Raja Mansingh who having rebelled against Sindhia had joined Taty Tope led the enemies to the secret hiding place where Taty Tope slept. They seized him while asleep, rudely awakened him, and took his captive to Sipri where he was court-martialled. His defence, as stated by Malleson, was simple. "I only obeyed, in all things that I did, my master's orders, namely, Nana Saheb's orders, up to the capture of Kalpi ; afterwards, those of Rao Saheb. I have nothing to state except that I have had nothing to do with the murder of any European men, women or children ; neither had I, at any time, given orders for any one to be hanged." A sound and reasoned defence : but reason had no place in the proceedings at this stage. He was sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out at Sipri on 18th April 1859. The betrayal of Taty Tope by Mansingh is one of those ugly spots that have besmeared our history. It is recorded in the contemporary issues of "*Warhad (Berar) Samachar*" that this cowardly act sent a wave of abhorrence throughout the province. The relatives of Mansingh and others belonging to his class who were settled down in this province resolved to disown him and boycott him completely. Mansingh is thus the first of the quislings whose tribe increased in the years that followed.

It now remains only to tell briefly of the counter-offensive launched by the British to quell the uprising in Sagar-Narmada Territories. It started in earnest with the arrival of Sir Hugh Rose in Sagar on 3rd February 1858, after capturing the fort of Rahatgarh. Sagar offered no resistance; and this was followed by the capture of Garha Kota, between Sagar and Damoh. Before Rose left Sagar district for Jhansi most of the police posts had been recaptured, except Malthone which was held by the Raja of Banpur. Even this was lost a month later when the combined forces of Sagar and of General Rose attacked the fort, and took the Maddanpore pass, inflicting great slaughter. As already noticed, with the fall of Ramgarh after death of the Rani, Mandla resistance began to give way. Sohagpur alone held out for some time longer until June 1858, when it was captured by the Mandla troops assisted by two detachments, one from Raipur and the other from Rewa. On May 16, one of the foremost leaders of the resistance, Dhilan Shah of Maddanpur in Narsimhapur district (who had been also a leader of the 1842 movement), was captured while he was attempting to recover his lost estate of Maddanpur. Dhilan Shah was tried and hanged. This was a blow to the movement in Narsimhapur where the rising subsided thereafter. The proclamation of amnesty

ordered by the Governor-General was made known in these territories in May 1858, and several resisters who were either lukewarm or had become despirited, took this opportunity to surrender. A few others, more determined, like Himmat Singh of Neemkhera and Mirbhan Singh of Narsimhapur remained at large, but were, for the most part, confined to the hills and jungles. By August 10, 1858, the Commissioner of Sagar-Narmada Territory was enabled to report, "I can now with confidence and pleasure state that peace is restored in my Division of eight districts, for although we have some leaders still at large, their followers are but few . . . and they will, it is hoped, soon be hunted down." (Erskine's *Narrative*.)

The causes for the failure of the 1857 rising have been analysed at length by historians. The major weakness of the movement was, as seen already, the absence of proper, coordinated organisation. For a rebellion to succeed, there should be a nucleus of well-knit organisation which could take over the Government of areas that are taken possession of. There was no such set-up behind the movement. There were many leaders of great ability and influence who could have been entrusted with the local government of the districts that fell to the so-called rebels. These could have been at once brought under an orderly administration, taking the general directions from a skeleton Central Government. Thus, as one district after another came to the possession of the popular leaders it would have settled down to an orderly life, and would have helped in the further advance of the uprising. In the absence of any such planned organisation, what happened was that the moment an area was captured by the insurgents, all law and order for a time disappeared from it. The camp followers of both sides roamed about the country-side and helped themselves to anything that came their way, by force and violence, if necessary. The villagers had to flee in terror, and when they dared to come back, some time later, they found their homes destroyed and property looted. This happened time and again in many places, and after some months of this experience, the people began to long for a respite from this uncertainty, even at the cost of their liberty. Any power that held out a promise of orderly, secure administration was welcome. This explains partly why the attempt of Tatyasaheb Tope to rouse the people once again in November 1858, did not meet with success. As Sardar Panikkar says, "If during that period (i.e., May to August 1857) a reasonable central government could have been established and the activities of the rebels coordinated, the British would have found it difficult to maintain their position in the interior, and they would have been compelled to withdraw to their coastal fortification." (*A Survey of Indian History*, p. 205).

Moreover, when a struggle is fought on the basis of military strength, the result is ultimately bound to be in favour of the side which has superior military equipment. Even in the struggle between the Mughals and Shivaji, it was proved that in spite of the brilliance of Shivaji's military genius, the advantage of a military engagement, time and again, went to the side which possessed superior artillery and striking force. Therefore, although the armies of the popular leaders during 1857 had larger numbers and the general support of the people, they were unable to withstand the better equipped British army. The breech-loading guns of the English troops and their heavier field-guns out-ranged and silenced the muzzle-loading and home-made guns used by the insurgents. Moreover the cavalry units of the English army, led by persons who had seen many wars in India and abroad, were better skilled in the latest methods of warfare than our own leaders, however brave they might have been. The fact is, the British always knew how to meet violence with violence. If an issue is to be settled on terms of armed resistance they could always meet the situation promptly and efficiently. They were on familiar ground. It was a game they could play in their own way. But it was only when they were faced with non-violence, by the determined resistance of thousands of unarmed men and women, that they found themselves at sea. It was a situation for which neither their training nor their experience had prepared them. If the outbreak of 1857 proved anything at all, it proved the futility of Indians attempting to win back their freedom by an armed resistance. Because, granting that we had the organisation, leadership and the statesmanship to establish orderly government in all the liberated areas, and had succeeded in driving the English back to their coastal forts, it would not have been long before the superiority of the British military strength asserted itself.

In the perspective of history the Great Outbreak of 1857 marks the last attempt of the feudal order to shake off the foreign rule and assert the independence of the country. It was a desperate effort of the landed and ruling classes to vindicate the honour and dignity of the nation. Although led and directed by the dispossessed classes, it was a struggle to regain national freedom. That the struggle did not succeed was due to certain factors involved in the very nature of the struggle itself. It was some time before the people and their leaders profited by the lessons of the failure.

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## CHAPTER X

### THE AFTERMATH OF THE UPRISING

The Revolt of 1857 was put down with a relentless repression which led to a reign of terror in the country. The officers in the districts were armed with summary powers to deal with the situation. What the tumbrils of the French Revolution were to the Revolutionaries in France, the Act XVIII of 1857 was to the British—with this difference, that in the former case the Revolutionaries used it against the ruling class, whereas the Act XVIII of 1857 was used against the people. This legislation gave summary powers to the Deputy Commissioners. Under Section II, they could try any person for mutiny and desertion. Section III of the Act makes it lawful for any police officer or other persons to apprehend without warrant any person, upon reasonable suspicion that he is a mutineer or a deserter. The Deputy Commissioner had the power, on conviction, to sentence the offender to death or transportation for life, and his sentence was final and conclusive. If a sentence of death is passed, the same may be carried into execution immediately, or at such time as he may direct. To facilitate the apprehension of persons, and to pander to the greed of unscrupulous persons, the Deputy Commissioners throughout the province were authorised to pay a reward of twenty rupees for every sepoy and one hundred rupees for every Indian officer who may be apprehended and convicted. The reward was to be given to the person or persons who helped in securing the apprehension. When we remember that the salary of a sepoy in those days was normally Rs. 3 annas 4, we can realise the strength of the temptation offered. (See Nagpur Commissioner's circular letter to Deputy Commissioners No. 94 of 1857, dated 30th June 1857.)

It is almost impossible to know the total number of persons tried and executed under these draconian provisions during 1857-58. Neither the directive given to the officers nor the temper of the Englishmen at the time is calculated to foster any spirit of moderation. Thousands of innocent persons must have been hanged, not to speak of thousands of others killed when villages were burnt wholesale. It would appear that a common method adopted by the Englishmen to strike terror into the hearts of the people, was to set fire to whole villages in a most indiscriminate way. This went to such an extent that it was found necessary for the Commissioner of Nagpur to issue a circular to all the Deputy Commissioners in the

province, discouraging this kind of vandalism. The Circular, dated 31st October 1857, says:

"The Commissioner has observed that in some instances there still exists an inclination to destroy entire villages which were inhabited by persons who have rebelled against the State . . . . Although the measure was not entirely prohibited by Government, yet a wholesale destruction of property by the officers of Government, without due regard to the guilt or innocence of those who are affected by it, was pronounced strongly reprehensible. There are cases in which the house of the chief rebel in a village should be destroyed, as an example. . . . The wholesale destruction of a village or of property is hereby prohibited without the special orders of the Commissioner previously obtained in each case."

These extracts provide some indication of the ruthlessness and vindictiveness of the Government against which the people pitted themselves, which only serves to enhance the value of their heroism and sacrifice.

One of the consequences of the outbreak and its failure was to create a racial bitterness which poisoned the relationship between the Englishman and the Indian almost permanently. It generated in the minds of the British a hysterical sense of fear, which found expression in an exhibition of racial arrogance. To what absurd limits this attitude could take them is revealed in a circular letter issued by Erskine, Commissioner of Jabalpur, to the Deputy Commissioners of the districts in Sagar-Narmada Territories. It is dated 11th March 1858, when according to Erskine, "the tide of rebellion seemed to be receding." The circular read thus:

"I shall feel obliged by your fully making it known to all your native Government servants that when they meet an European Gentleman, whether he may be in civil employ or not, that they will be considered as disrespectful and be treated accordingly if they do not make the customary *salaam*.

"It is not necessary that policemen should make a military salute. I consider their native custom will show greater respect.

"Native not in the service of Government cannot be punished for not saluting, but all well-trying and well-inclined natives will never pass or meet a gentleman without *salaaming* and though no orders can be issued on the subject, I beg you will intimate to all, in ordinary conversation and in a kindly manner, that by their markedly showing respect to European gentlemen after their native fashion, the act will conduce much.

towards healing the wounds which more or less existed in most districts since the late outbreak."

The year 1858 is an important landmark in the history of modern India. It is the dividing line separating the despotism of the company's administration from the bureaucracy of the Crown rule. Many of the features of bureaucratic Government which have been familiar to us in modern times, against which the national movement carried on its struggle for over half a century, came into being after this date. It was during this period that the administration acquired those qualities of ruthless efficiency, wooden inflexibility and haughtiness which earned for it among the national leaders the epithet of 'soul-less'. The officers sent out into the districts after the British Crown and Parliament had taken over the Government of country, were imbued with this spirit and vigorously addressed themselves to the job of putting down every potential element of disturbance, instilling into the hearts of the people a feeling of terror, and holding the land with an iron hand. The average British official, steeped in the wave of anti-Indian feeling which the recent outbreak had generated, undertook this task in a spirit of combative vindictiveness. A correspondent of *The Times* of London, who happened to be in India at the time, observed: "The Mutiny has produced too much hatred and ill-feeling between the two races to render any mere change of name of the rulers (i.e. from the Company to the Crown) a remedy for evils which affected India. . . . Many years must elapse before the evil passions excited by these disturbances expire; perhaps confidence will never be restored; and if so, our reign in India will be maintained at the cost of suffering which it is fearful to contemplate." (Russell: *My Diary in India*, Vol. II.)

The racial antagonism poisoned every aspect of life in the country. The British community in India whose numbers began to increase steadily after 1858, formed themselves into an exclusive caste,—a sort of Trade Union—cut off from the life and people of the country, bound together by ties of self-interest and self-preservation. The average Englishman was taught to adopt a contemptuous attitude towards the Indian, towards whom a rude and haughty bearing was considered to be the proper conduct; while at the same time the Indian should be compelled to show the Englishman every mark of servile respect.

"When I first arrived in the country it was duly enjoined on me, as a matter of vital importance, that I should insist on all the outward and visible signs of deference and respect which Orientals



with a leaning to sycophancy, resulting from generations of subjection and foreign rule, are only too willing to accord." (Sir Henry Cotton: *Indian and Home Memories*.)

This attitude became more and more wide-spread as the number of Englishmen arriving in India increased. One of the results of the Government passing from the hands of the Company to the British Parliament was the free play given to private traders, planters and other commercial adventurers who had formerly been prevented from entering the country, in competition with the Company. In fact, Government tacitly encouraged the large-scale migration of Englishmen into India in the belief that a larger European population would be a safeguard against another rising by Indians. Thus, in the sixties of the 19th century there was an influx of Englishmen in the country, all of them filled with the strong anti-Indian sentiments which prevailed in England during the 1857-58 outbreak.

The stage was thus set for a period of high-handed, repressive rule in India. The vestiges of popular revolt, wherever they were seen, were crushed ruthlessly by wreaking vengeance upon the people indiscriminately. It would appear that the events of 1857 had knocked all human sentiments out of the British character. They were filled with "the mutiny mentality", which meant that in their thought and action there was no room for considerations of human feelings and civilised behaviour. The first step in repressing the sources of disturbance was to ask all Deputy Commissioners to prepare list of families in the district which had been thought to be guilty of revolt. Every village was thus surveyed, and names of persons recorded whose guilt or innocence was never carefully scrutinised. It may be presumed that these lists were largely the results of the prejudices of petty officialdom. For instance, entries like this appear in the district lists of Hoshangabad.

"*Thakur Lakshman Singh*, resident of Holkar territory: He is the relation of rebel chief Thakur Daulat Singh. He accompanied Daulat Singh who was very active in rebellion."

"*Bhaktawar Singh Mandloi*, a Zamindar of Harda, district Hoshangabad: This man assisted the mutinous police and other bad characters in Harda. This man's jagir of rent-free tenure and malguzari facilities should be confiscated.

In this manner, district after district was combed and the property of suspected persons was confiscated. But confiscation was

the mildest form of retribution. In some cases persons so suspected had to pay with their lives. It is recorded that a resident of Sagar who was said to have supplied the rebellions sepoys with boots, was summoned before the Deputy Commissioner; but he failed to appear before him. He was, therefore, seized in his house and executed in a public place by being nailed to a tree. Even today local tradition identifies the tree on which he was thus brutally executed.

Stories of such atrocities can be multified not only in the Central Provinces, but all over the country. In North-Western Provinces, in Delhi, Punjab and Oudh, the hysterical British officers hunted down people who may, in some remote manner, have been connected with the Great Revolt. The emergence of any sign of disquiet was promptly met with all the ferocity and brutality that the officers were capable of. An incident in point is the inhuman punishment meted out to sixty-six persons who had taken part in the Maler Kotla case of 1872 in the Punjab. These sixty-six persons had fled into Patiala State. The State authorities handed them over to the nearest Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Cowan, at Ludhiana. True to his tribe, Mr. Cowan wrote immediately to his Commissioner, Mr. Forsyth, saying, "the entire gang has been nearly destroyed. I propose blowing away from guns or hanging the prisoners tomorrow at day-break". The Commissioner Forsyth wrote to him two letters, asking him to keep the persons till he himself arrived for trial. But Mr. Cowan, too impatient to carry out exemplary punishment on the prisoners, put the letters into his pocket, gave no more thought about it, and proceeded to execute the prisoners. Next day forty-nine of the prisoners had been strapped to the guns and blown to pieces. The fiftieth person broke from the guard, rushed at Mr. Cowan, and caught him by the beard, but he was promptly cut down by the officers in attendance. Meanwhile, when Mr. Forsyth arrived the next day and found that fifty had already been put to death, he chivalrously took upon himself the responsibility for Cowan's act, and sanctioned the execution of the remaining sixteen also. They were all hanged. In the face of an act of such inhuman brutality, in defiance of law and the orders of the superior officers, the best that the Government of India could do was to pass a mild resolution regretting the act of Cowan, and Mr. Forsyth's acquiescence in the act. To save their face, Government removed Cowan from service, but Forsyth was able to procure for him "a very good appointment" in India. Forsyth himself rose to be Sir Douglas Forsyth and was decorated for service beyond the Frontier.

This case from the Punjab has been referred to, merely as an example which reveals the mentality and outlook of the British in India in those days. In spite of the obvious inhumanity of this action, the sympathy of the entire official class and of the Anglo-Indian press was with the perpetrators of the act, Cowan and Forsyth. The fact that an incident of this nature could take place nearly fifteen years after the outbreak of 1857, proves that the British in India had not recovered from the fear-complex and hysteria of 1857. In fact, it is doubtful whether they ever grew out of the frame of mind throughout the remaining years of their rule in the country. Any act of violence by the Indians let loose an orgy of inhuman persecution by the Government. The tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh is of a piece with the worst excesses committed by the British after 1857. According to official figures, 1,500 innocent persons were butchered by machine-gun fire in ten minutes, merely for the sake of teaching the Indians a lesson, of proving the invincibility of British strength. To the British manner of thinking, the only way to keep down the people and curb any inclination to rise against their authority, was by an exhibition of unashamed and ruthless power. It was against this mental background that the British administration after 1858 was built up. The laws enacted by the Government, the policies that they adopted in all spheres of Government activity, and the spirit with which their actions were imbued, took their colour from this mental make-up.

One of the first measures of legislation enacted by the Government to curb the spirit of the people and render them powerless, was the Act for disarming the people, the Act XXVIII of 1857. This Act was enforced with the utmost severity, and the whole population was deprived of their arms and weapons which were confiscated to the Government. Arms of all sorts and description, swords, axes, garasa, spears, iron bound clubs, not to speak of fire-arms, were taken away from the people. We have come across an account of how these operations were conducted in the North-Western Provinces (of which the northern portion of our province formed a part at that time), the thoroughness with which searches were carried out, and the common people and the Zamindars were terrorised into yielding whatever arms they possessed even for self-defence. It is to be remembered that the country remained in a state of disturbance for a long time, while the people were deprived of the means of defending themselves against violence.

The provisions of the Disarming Act were enforced with great thoroughness. The Governor-General issued a circular of instructions for the guidance of the authorities in the North-Western Provinces. No doubt the officers could be depended

upon to supplement by their zeal whatever the rigour of the instructions may have omitted. The pet theory of the British Government was that the events of 1857 represented little more than the mutiny of a few regiments of the Indian Army. The British officers and administrators, as well as the modern historians of England are never tired of stressing the purely military character of the Indian rising. They are equally at pains to disprove that it was a movement for the recovery of national independence. If it was really so, there was no need of proceeding against the people as a whole. The mutinous army had been defeated and broken. The "mutineers" and the rebels had been punished, hanged, tortured and blown off from guns. Why, then, these draconian measures against the people who, according to the British testimony, were hardly touched by the mutiny of a few misguided and mischievous regiments. Obviously, the British knew in their hearts, though they would not admit it, that it was the people of India, and not just a few regiments, that were determined to be rid of them. Hence, the systematic and thorough manner in which the disarmament of the entire civil population was carried out. A circular was issued to the Commissioners prescribing, in general terms, the method to be adopted in this work :

"The Magistrate should issue notification throughout each Pargunnah to be disarmed, warning the people to take all their arms to the Thannah, and intimating that after a fixed interval of ten days or a fortnight . . . wherever there be reason to suspect that all arms have not been given up, the provisions of Sections (xxiv) and (xxv) of Act XXVIII of 1857, will be brought into operation."

For the purpose of judging how far arms had been completely surrendered, the procedure followed in some parts of the Meerut Division was considered to be most useful. The Magistrate was directed that he should make the Census of 1852 the groundwork of his calculation. Taking the number of men for each village or town, the Magistrate was required to form an approximate estimate of the number of arms to be recovered. The estimate was to vary according to the caste and tribe of the people. In the search for the arms, the warlike sections of the community were subjected to special attention. "For Rajpoots and other warlike castes, the calculation may be made probably at a sword for each adult male, and an iron bound club or perhaps a guarassa, at the rate of 75 per cent of adult men. For Pathans, a sword and knife per man, and a gun or matchlock for every two men. Banjaras, a sword or a spear per man. The unwarlike classes as Baniyas, Kachees, etc., might be treated at perhaps 50 per cent for swords."

Every village was made to yield up arms according to this calculation, and if the number of arms surrendered was deficient, the Magistrate was to call upon the Zamindars of the village or persons of influence in the locality, to induce the inhabitants voluntarily to deliver any arms that may be remaining. But even when the estimated number of weapons was given, the Magistrate was not to stay his proceedings, but every effort was to be made to recover even the most inoffensive arms that might have been kept back by the people. "The disarming", to quote the circular, "is to be thorough and complete". It should be clearly understood that the disarming operations were to affect only the Indian people and "were not to extend beyond the native population".

The powers conferred on the Local Governments by the Disarming Act of 1857, though wide and comprehensive, did not satisfy the vengeful zeal of their officers, who clamoured for the application of more drastic penalties upon people who might be, even remotely, suspected of possessing arms. The truth is that the Disarming Act provided the British officers with an excuse for demanding more powers for subjecting the Indian to humiliating treatment so as to break his spirit.

This persistent demand of the various Provincial Governments found vent in several letters to the Government of India. They harped upon "the insufficiency of the six Sections of the Act XXVIII of 1857, as a disarming enactment". They demanded "measures more stringent than the law in question provides for, with a view to the attainment of the objects for which this law was passed". They said that what they wanted was "a stringent order for the delivery of arms". They insisted that they be permitted to employ measures akin to the martial law. The view commonly held by the British officers was that the severity and rigour of the law should be so intensified as to compel "the delivery of all arms for which the Magistrate does not grant a licence, under severe penalties, and to render the Zamindars and Tikkedars liable for the retention of arms by their tenants in all cases when they might, by ordinary diligence, have discovered them".

Needless to say, the people did not surrender their arms without difficulty. Possession of arms was a sign of respectability and means of self-defence, specially in the disturbed condition of the time. Among the Indian people, the right of carrying arms was a matter of prestige hallowed by custom and tradition. It was, therefore, not surprising that the British officers should have encountered resistance in enforcing a law which went against the traditional rights of the people.

Not satisfied with a law which was, in all conscience, already comprehensive and thorough, the Local Governments loudly demanded provisions to be included in the Act, making the Zamindars responsible for the notice given of all arms in the villages within their estates. They argued that it was impossible for the Magistrate to know whether "all or even half the residents have sent in their lists". It was, therefore, imperative that the Zamindars and their servants in each village, Tikkedars and headmen of each village, be made answerable for the complete disarmament of the people inhabiting their estates. Unless this was done "we shall never be able to get correct lists of the arms in the district, and consequently never be able to collect them". The Disarming Act of 1857, in their view, was not a Disarming Act at all and was most inadequate for the purpose it was intended to achieve, namely, to execute a thorough and complete disarmament. Luckily, the Supreme Government of Calcutta did not concede these extravagant demands, and pointed out, in detail, that the existing law was sufficient for the purpose for which it was meant, and warned the Local Governments that "it is not advisable, if it can be avoided, to amend the law, or begin a fresh course of coercive legislation at the present time".

When the Disarming Act of 1857 was about to expire in 1860, several officers addressed the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, in the most intemperate tone and language, on the dire need for extending the term of the Act. Some of these letters were so provocative and unrestrained that the Governor-General was constrained to express his "profound regret not only that they should have been published, but that they should have been written". These letters give a fair indication of the spirit of revenge in which the Act had been worked. It appears to be quite clear that the officers engaged in the work of disarming the people, adopted the foulest methods of coercion, torture and persecution in order to force the people to give up their arms. In spite of the officers trying to silence the mouths of protest, complaints of their atrocities reached the Governor-General who recognised in these transactions "unmistakeable allusions to measures of great severity and to measures beyond the law, as also a clear admission, on the part of the officers, of the fact that without the employment of such lawless measures surrender of arms could not be obtained".

When the authorities in the North-Western Provinces were asked to desist from any unlawful act in carrying out the disarming of the people, it brought forth this rather outspoken admission that " . . . the Lt.-Governor cannot undertake to declare

that in course of the disarming operations carried out in these provinces, no undue severity, and no measures beyond the law, have been resorted to".

The Disarming Act was made a permanent feature of the British policy in India, and was renewed in 1860 for a period of five years. In 1865 it was extended for another year, and in 1866 it was extended indefinitely, until the Governor-General in Council should declare otherwise. In 1870 the Bengal Government complained that the Act was inefficient and inadequate. It permitted the importation of cheap guns and rifles. The great majority of Local Governments suggested that throughout India no man should possess fire-arms without a licence. After discussions lasting over eight years, the Arms Act of 1878 introduced licensing of fire-arms throughout India, imposed a heavy import duty and made the penalties more stringent. The rules made under the Act exempted, among others, Europeans and half-caste Eurasians.

The provisions of the Act were criticised by Indian public opinion. They also earned the censure of Gladstone on the ground that special laws restraining the possession of arms indicated a distrust of the people. Till 1878, the importation of arms and the use of gunpowder and other explosives had been either wholly or to a great extent free in India, and it was most necessary that that freedom should not be restricted or withdrawn. It is common knowledge that arms were required in India for protection from wild beasts and serpents, a danger unknown in England, while commercial enterprises, such as public works and rail roads and almost every engineering work, depended largely upon the use of explosive materials.

The interest taken by Gladstone in this subject was to prove significant, as it committed the victorious Liberal Party to its repeal. The Viceroy, Lord Ripon, was directed by the Secretary of State for India to look into the question as soon as possible, since the Prime Minister was anxious about it. It was not the intention of Ripon to repeal the law, but only to modify it. The Local Governments were addressed on the subject, but after prolonged correspondence it was found that the Civil Service was hostile and the Local Governments were opposed to any softening of this unpopular measure. Nevertheless, a Bill was drafted and forwarded to London for the approval of the British Government. But the India Council, dominated by the diehard bureaucracy, killed the projected measure and soon after, all further attempts to renew it were drowned in the

uproar caused by the Ilbert Bill. The result was that this unpopular law passed by Lytton in 1878 remained on the Statute Book, in all its sweeping rigour and severity.

The confiscation of the property of those who had fought against the British went hand in hand with the disarming operations. We have already seen how every Deputy Commissioner had been asked to prepare a list of so-called "rebels" and sympathisers of "rebels", whose property could be confiscated. The policy of confiscation was pushed on with great severity and the slightest excuse or suspicion was enough to bring the people under its cruel operation resulting in open loot and blunder.\* The people most severely affected by these Acts were those living in the northern districts of Madhya Pradesh. It will be recalled that the districts of Sagar, Damoh and Jabalpur were the centres of anti-British resistance, and the people of this area, led by their local chieftains and Rajas, had carried on a persistent war against the British. The leading Zamindars of the territories around Jabalpur had been the foremost in organising a large force against the British; and they were the worst sufferers from the confiscations. For instance, all the property of Raja Shankar Shah and his son Raghunath Shah was confiscated; and even when the days of cruel and vengeful reprisals were over, the British authorities did not spare the helpless and innocent widow of Raghunath Shah whom they decided to be "worthy of no consideration". Similarly, the principality of Bijeyraghogarh in the Jabalpur district was confiscated, and the ruling family banished. The estates of Mangarh and Shahgarh in the Sagar district also suffered the same fate, as a reprisal for the revolt by the Rajas. The whole of the property of the Raja of Mangarh was confiscated. All the cash found in the fortress of the Raja together with elephants, horses, ponies, tatus, heads of cattle, tents, weapons (including matchlocks, swords, spears) and brass vessels, was confiscated. No mercy was shown to anyone against whom there was the slightest suspicion of disloyalty. The work of confiscation was methodically carried on, in so thorough and sweeping a way, that almost every person of consequence suffered from its unjust operation. Not only famous leaders like those mentioned above, and others of similar status, like the Chanda Zamindars, Venkat Rao and Bapu Rao, and Nagpur chieftains like Nawab Qadir Ali Khan, but even less known land-

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\*The Commissioner of Jabalpur division, Erskine, says, "I have little doubt that the increase of revenue from the forfeited taluqs, villages and patches of land would be some lakhs of rupees in my own division alone". (Letter from Erskine to the Secretary to Government of India, dated 9th January, 1858).



holders, thousands of them, scattered in every district, were deprived of their property on the slightest suspicion. There were many who had forsaken their estates and gone into hiding to escape from the British prosecution. A prize was put on their heads and all their possessions were confiscated. For instance, the records in the Sagar District Office contain a list of persons of this class, giving the nature of their "offence", and the rewards sanctioned for their apprehension. It contains such entries as these:—

Name of person with caste, residence, etc.	Nature of conduct, given in detail	Rewards sanctioned or proposed for apprehension
(1)	(2)	(3)
Thakur Kishore Singh agent of Oomrao Singh, Lodhi, Cobareedar, minor of Hindore a Tulloora and Bukcet Singh, sharer of Hindoria Lodhi.	When the disturbance commenced in the district, Kishore Singh, agent with all his brothers and followers through the inducement of the Rebel Raja of Shaghur attacked, Damoh, on the 10th of July last. Took possession of the Thana and destroyed the records of the Tehselee and Moonsiff's offices. He then returned to Hindoria having been attacked and defeated by the Detachment of 42nd Bengal Infantry stationed at Damoh. He returned in company with the Shaghur Raja's force with two heavy guns and about 4,000 matchlock men and was again defeated by the companies of 31st and 42nd Bengal Infantry. He plundered many villages in the Damoh district and held the Koomaree Thana with its villages for 4½ months.	Rs. 1,000 reward was fixed in the commencement of the disturbances on the head of the Kishore Singh.
Dewan Me h u r b a n Singh, father is Lodhi and mother is Gond of Heera-pore, Narsinghpore district and malguzar of Tuppa.	A noted rebel opposed the Government in Damoh, Jabalpur and Narsinghpur districts known by the name of Raja Jungee. He and his father Raja Herday Shah of Heera-pore rebelled in 1842, but were pardoned by major Sleeman, then Commissioner of Sagar and Nerbada Territories	Rs. 500 reward from Narsinghpur district was fixed for the capture of this noted rebel.
Zalim Singh Rajput, resident of Bumrore Chouthal, Pergunnah Nasingurh.	He was a noted rebel in Narsingurh Pergunnah and took service with the Shaghur Rajah. He has been caught and committed to the Special Commissioner of Act 14 of 1857.	His property and effects of every description have been confiscated to Government.

The above narrative furnishes only a few cases, selected at random, of the confiscation of the jagirs and properties effected by the British in the region of Jabalpur and the neighbouring districts.

These cases prove that the purpose of the Government was to break the spirit of the common people by means of the most relentless acts of vindictiveness.

The method adopted by the British to suppress the popular rising struck terror among the people. Whole villages were ravaged and burnt. The dispossessed persons were reduced to severe privations. As a result of the confiscation of large estates and small properties, men of affluence and position suddenly found themselves turned into paupers. Their dependents could hope for no mercy at the hands of the victorious feringhee. The slightest suspicion of disloyalty was sufficient to set in motion against the helpless victim the most ruthless measures of revenge and persecution. For a time, the free spirit of man was struck down in speechless awe.

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## CHAPTER XI

### THE FORMATION OF THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

The convulsions of 1857 affected mainly the Sagar-Narmada territories: only a few ripples travelled south of the Narmada. The British historians are never tired of referring with satisfaction to the tranquillity that prevailed in Nagpur province while the whole of the north was aflame with the rising. Official records contain fulsome compliments to Plowden, the Nagpur Commissioner, and his Deputy Commissioners for the excellent manner in which they maintained peace in this part of the country. We have already seen that the British owed this happy state of affairs not to the administrative talents of Plowden, but, in a large measure, to Rani Bakabai and her influence. Nevertheless, the Government could justifiably feel that the Nagpur province had behaved well during the troubled times. It was the northern possessions that had proved intransigent. The whole of Bundelkhand had been a seething cauldron during 18 months and its jungle fastnesses even now concealed many important leaders of the revolt whom the long arm of law had been unable to capture. Therefore, the proper settlement of Bundelkhand was of the utmost importance for the pacification of Central India.

In 1858, the British possessions in Bundelkhand formed a part of the North-Western Provinces. The northern Bundelkhand, namely, Jhansi, Jaloun, Banda and Hamirpur had all been acquired by the British at different times and was administered by the Lt. Governor at Agra. The southern Bundelkhand forming what has been known as the Sagar-Narmada territories had come to the British hands from the Peshwa and the Bhonsla. After a period of experiment in administering this region directly under the supreme Government, it was joined to the North-Western Provinces in 1820. Between the northern and southern Bundelkhand there were a few small feudatory States forming the central Bundelkhand which during the disturbed days of 1857-58 had generally remained faithful to the British, namely the States of Datia, Orchha, Chhatarpur and Panna.

Several considerations led to the realignment of these districts. It was obvious that the linking of the Sagar-Narmada territories with the North-Western Provinces had been unnatural. In fact the administrative arrangement for this area appears to have presented a problem for a considerable time. Ever since these territories were

ceded to the British, they had been shifted back and forth, between the North-Western Provinces and direct administration under the Supreme Government. At the time the great outbreak occurred, they were a part of the North-Western Provinces. But the economy and administrative problems of the Narmada valley were very different from those of the Gangetic valley. It was difficult for the Government at Agra or even at Allahabad to exercise proper supervision over the administration of the Sagar-Narmada Territories. Communications between these areas and the provincial headquarters were imperfect. The disturbances that broke out in these territories were conveniently attributed to the lack of effective supervision and contact with the provincial headquarters. Therefore, they felt that it would conduce to orderly life and the preservation of peace if the Sagar-Narmada Territories are joined to the Nagpur province which, as pointed out earlier, had maintained an exemplary conduct of subservience during the difficult months. This view was further supported by reasons of road communications and common economic interests between the Nagpur province and the Sagar-Narmada Territories. They probably felt that it would help in bringing the northern districts to better sense if they were detached from the turbulent elements of Bundelkhand and hitched to the peace-abiding province of Nagpur.

As for the northern parts of Bundelkhand, all of them were under the North-Western Provinces, which later was constituted into the United Province of Agra and Oudh. The petty States of central Bundelkhand, noted for their loyalty formed, together with the territories of Scindia and Holkar, the Central India Agency. Thus the map of the middle portions of India which had been the centre of all the violence and disturbance during 1857-58 underwent a total change and took the shape in which it more or less continued up to the achievement of Freedom. The Central Provinces, which were constituted in 1861, i.e., three years after the Great Revolt was put down, were placed under a Chief Commissioner residing at Nagpur, directly responsible to the Supreme Government, as a Non-Regulation Province. From this date, until the end of the century, there were very few territorial changes in the province. The administration was in the hands of a succession of Chief Commissioners whose duty it was to administer the province under the directions of the Central Government. The ruling purpose of the administration was to collect the revenue, maintain law and order and defend the frontiers of the country. One of the consequences of the uprising was the reluctance of the British rulers to interfere with the social or religious life of the people. There was a feeling that the popular rising which took place in the country was due to

the reformist policy of Dalhousie, and to the legislation which affected the social life of Hindus. Government, therefore, decided now to have no more to do with the life of the people, except to see that peace was maintained and revenue collected. They undertook neither schemes for the reorganisation of society, nor for raising the moral or material standard of the people, nor for increasing the national wealth of the country.

This does not mean that there was little legislative activity during the period. On the contrary, from 1861 onwards Government of India put forth a series of enactments which affected the administration of all provinces; such as, the Indian Councils Act, the Land Revenue, Tenancy and Forests Acts, the three great Codes, namely, the Penal Code—which though drafted by Macaulay in 1837, was actually introduced only in 1862,—the Criminal Procedure Code and the Civil Procedure Code. It was during this period that the Police Act of 1861 was passed which laid the foundation of the police system, more or less as we have it today, with a district police force in every district under a Superintendent of Police.

The Resolution of 2nd November 1961, by which Government of India formally established the Central Provinces, says that—

“The Sagar-Narmada Territories, conjoined with the Province of Nagpur, form a compact area of about 90,000 square miles, with a population of more than six million souls, and revenues amounting in the total to about three-quarters of a million sterling per annum. And although within the limits of this area some varieties of race, language and custom exist, yet many of the districts, tribes and classes which it comprises are either quite homogeneous, or have a strong resemblance and affinity to each other.”

The Resolution laid down the districts that should comprise the Central Provinces. They were: Nagpur, Chanda, Bhandara, Chhindwara, Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Sironcha with dependencies of Bastar and Kuronda—all of which formed the Nagpur Territory; and Sagar, Damoh, Jabalpur, Mandla, Seoni, Betul, Narsimhapur and Hoshangabad—all of which were the Sagar-Narmada Territories. The Resolution also laid down the number of officers with their salaries required for the administration of the province.

One of the consequences of the British Crown and Parliament taking over the Government of India was the large influx of European staff to man the administration. The Company had been reluctant to bring out into the country more English officers than the absolute minimum necessary for their purpose. The English

officer was always an expensive liability ; and the Company could not be sure that he might not carry on some private trade on his own account. Not so the British Government, when they took over the administration. In every province they created a number of new services each of which was placed entirely under the control of European officers. A lesson they had learnt from the recent outbreak was not to trust Indians in any key positions. Thus in the years that followed 1861, a number of new departments were created in the Provinces : a Public Works Department ; Agriculture and Forest Departments ; an Education Department under a European Director of Public Instruction ; Public Health Department ; the Railways, and so on. All these new services provided jobs for many Englishmen, so that according to an estimate, in 1913 there were 2,501 administrative and judicial appointments in the country with salaries of over Rs. 800. Out of these 2,153 posts were held by Europeans, 106 by Anglo-Indians, and only 242 by Indians. (Thompson and Garrett: *British Rule in India*.)

Thus grew up the great bureaucracy in India. Administration became departmentalised : it became more and more divorced from the life of the people. Each department concerned itself strictly within the narrow limits of its special functions, which hardly ever reached the villages. The only limb of Government that the village knew was the Revenue Collector, and his exactions daily grew heavier. At the end of the revolt of 1857, the financial position of the country was alarming. The suppression of the revolt had cost the British a very large amount, estimated at 40 millions, and they had no compunction in making India pay for it. When the Crown took over the Government of India they were faced with a deficit of 36 millions, and the first thing they did was to impose new taxes. The salt duties which India had always considered an immoral imposition and against which, many years later, the Indian National Congress led a strong movement, were immediately increased. A uniform duty of 10 per cent was imposed on all imports, and, for the first time, a small income-tax was introduced. The income-tax fell particularly heavily on the poorer classes, because the idea that a minimum income should be exempted was not, then, familiar to the Government. In fact, the Finance Member was of the view that the poor have a greater obligation to pay the tax than the rich, because "I believe the poor, . . . even more than the rich, are interested in the support of the State and the maintenance of social order."! (Financial Statement, 1862.)

The burden was equally heavy in the case of other taxes as well. The first assessments of land revenue in Central Provinces after 1858 were found to be heavy, because they were based on the

temporary boom and high prices which were a feature of the years following the Revolt. The result was that instead of the people realising how benevolent and just the administration under the Crown was, "at present they have only learnt how severe is the land tax of the British Government, how inexorable are the Collectors of Revenue, how tardy is the Justice of the Civil Courts, how imperfect yet oppressive is the police, and how uncertain the tenure of the hereditary land-holders of the country." (Major Ellis's *Memorandum*, dated 3rd October 1859.)

The Central Provinces acquired one more district in 1864 when Nimar was transferred to this province. The district of Nimar was under the Peshwas from 1760. It was later divided between Holkar and Sindhia and it continued to be an apple of discord between them till 1818. During this period, the district was ravaged by frequent incursions of Pindarees. The menace was so great that every village had to be fortified with crude earth-work. Many villages were forced to secure their safety by paying heavy ransom to the Pindarees. The strongest fortress in the district was Asirgarh which, as already stated, was held by a powerful chieftain Yeshwant Rao Lad who owed nominal allegiance to Sindhia. It defied all attacks for many decades until at last in 1818 it fell to the British, and under the Governor-General's Agent at Indore, Sir John Malcolm, those parts of the district which were held by the British, enjoyed comparative peace after 1818. It was only after the battle of Maharajpur in 1844 in which Sindhia was defeated that the district of Nimar was ceded to the British for the payment of the Gwalior contingent. From this time onwards, the whole of Nimar district came under British administration with the headquarters of the district at Mandleshwar. The immediate effect of British taking over the responsibility of administering the district was widespread distress among the cultivators owing to the very high assessment of land revenue made at the time. For 20 years after 1844, there was great difficulty in the collection of land revenue owing to the inability of cultivators to pay the high demand. In 1864, the district was finally joined to the newly-formed Central Provinces with which its future history became linked.

To complete the map of Madhya Pradesh, it is necessary to anticipate the accession of Berar to the province. The Berars, which had originally been a part of the Peshwa's territories, came into the Nizam's possession as his reward for helping the English to defeat the Maratha confederacy, on condition that the Nizam maintained a subsidiary force at his cost. Complaints that the pay of the troops had fallen in arrears began to grow, until at last



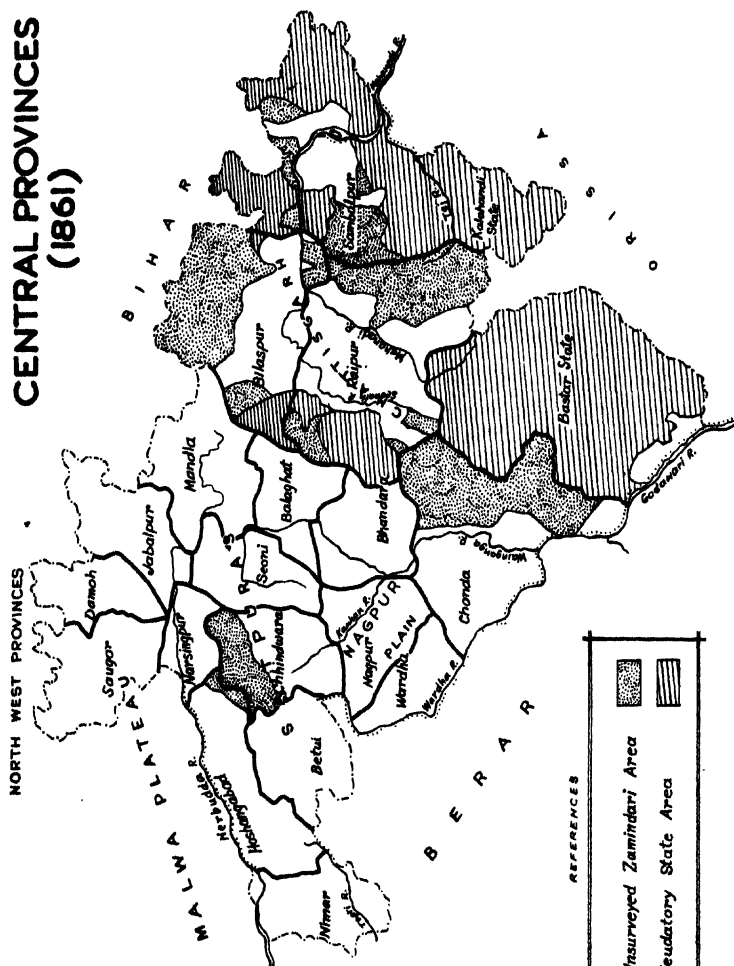
in 1853 the arrears payable to the Company were said to amount to fifty lakhs. This was sufficient reason for Dalhousie to annex Berars as a material guarantee for the regular payment of the troops. The British for their part undertook to maintain out of the revenue of these districts an auxiliary force of 5,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry, and also pay the expenses of the Hyderabad Subsidiary Force. The Berars were at that time divided into Northern and Southern Berar, and the administration of the Berars was vested in the British Resident at Hyderabad. The Northern Berar had an area of 6,400 square miles and a population of 950,000 with an annual income of Rs. 25,40,500. The Southern Berars occupied an area of 8,200 square miles, and had a population of 513,000 yielding an annual revenue of about Rs. 7,70,800. The Southern Berars included some parts of the present Hyderabad State such as Hingoli. The "loyal" conduct of the Nizam and his Prime Minister, Salar Jung, during the anxious months of the 1857 Revolt, was rewarded by the return of the southern parts of Berar including Hingoli and also the cancellation of the Nizam's debt of fifty lakhs. The Amravati and Akola districts were created in 1858, and a new district Wun (which later became Yeotmal) was formed in 1864. Buldana district came into being in 1867 and Basim in 1868, while Achalpur and Mehkar which had been at one time districts were abolished. An Agent of the Resident at Hyderabad was posted at Amravati for the better administration of Berar.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century there had been persistent demand both from the Nizam's Government and from a section of the public for the restoration of Berar to the Nizam. Naturally, nothing came of it. On the contrary, the British Government, professedly on grounds of economy, decided to take over the Berar on a lease in perpetuity from the Nizam, in consideration of an annual payment of Rs. 25 lakhs to the Nizam. This treaty was signed in December 1902, and the Berars were joined to the Central Provinces in 1903 to form the enlarged province of Central Provinces and Berar. In this form it remained until freedom came.

Of the fiduciary States under the Central Provinces administration, one only, viz., Makrai, the smallest of them, with an area of 215 square miles, was in the Hoshangabad district; and the remaining 14 were in the Chhattisgarh division, of which Khairagarh, Nandgaon, Chhuikhadan, Bamla, Rehrakhol, Sonpur, Bastar and Surguja were administered by their own chiefs, while Patna, Kalahandi, Sarangarh, Raigarh, Sakti and Kawardha were under Government management. Besides, there were about 116



# CENTRAL PROVINCES (1861)



REFERENCES

Unsurveyed Zamindari Area  
Feudatory State Area

non-fiduciary Zamindaris, the majority of which were of a small size. Mention, however, may be made of Ahiri in Chanda and others like Bhatgaon, Bhilaigarh, Champa, Paderiah, Aproha, Lafa, Chhuri, Kendo, Korba in the Bilaspur district, and of Phuljhar, Bora, Sambhar, Chandanpur and Padampur in the Sambalpur district. These Zamindaris were looked after by the Deputy Commissioners who kept them going. Practically all of them were chronically indebted.

The administration of the Central Provinces was carried on by the Chief Commissioner, aided by a Secretary, a Junior Secretary (who was also Director of Agriculture) and an Assistant Secretary. In addition to his general duties of superintendence, he was charged with the special supervision of the Revenue and Executive; the Courts—Civil and Criminal—were separately controlled under a Judicial Commissioner; the administrative staff consisted of four Commissioners, 18 Deputy Commissioners, 13 Assistant Commissioners, 33 Extra-Assistant Commissioners and 49 Tahsildars, distributed over 18 districts grouped into four divisions. The Police force consisting of 18 District Superintendents of Police, 2 Assistant Superintendents, 59 Inspectors and 8,372 petty officers and constables was controlled by Inspector-General in matter of discipline and internal relations generally, but in its executive functions was subordinate to the Deputy Commissioner.

Education, Forests, Conservation and Vaccination had separate establishments of their own, though the regular civil staff was expected to contribute assistance, direct or indirect, to the operations of these departments. Jail management, Excise, Sanitation and Registration were more or less in the hands of local officials but supervised by special officers. The Medical staff consisting of 18 Civil Surgeons, 18 Assistant Surgeons and 95 Hospital Assistants was directly subordinate to a Provincial Deputy Surgeon-General. The Public Works Department was more detached from the regular administrative staff, owing no subordination to any local authority but the Chief Commissioner to whom the Provincial Chief Engineer was Secretary in that Branch.

Next, in the scale of executive authority came the Commissioners of Divisions, who, in three of them, viz., Narmada, Nagpur and Hoshangabad were in charge of five districts each, while the Chhattisgarh Division had only three districts. The Sessions Judges having the power of awarding the sentence of death, subject to confirmation by the Judicial Commissioner, were also Civil Judges of appeal and responsible for general administration. But the unit of the executive scheme was the Deputy Commissioner

who was the Chief Magistrate of the district averaging in this province to 4,691 square miles in extent, with an average population of 546,600 (Census of 1881), and had also special criminal powers of imprisonment up to seven years in certain cases. His original civil jurisdiction was unlimited in amount and he heard appeals from his assistants up to Rs. 1,000. He was the Chief of the Police, the Chief Collector of Revenue, Conservator of the district forest, Supervisor of popular education, Marriage Registrar, Head of the local agencies for the management of roads, ferries, camping grounds, public gardens, rest-houses and other buildings not of an imperial character. These duties branched into many others, too numerous to mention, but it may be safely said that the Deputy Commissioner was the pivot of the district administration, responsible for the health and happiness of the entire district. In subordination to him the Civil Medical Officer known as the Civil Surgeon managed jails, lock-ups, lunatic asylums and dispensaries, and the police investigated all cases which were sufficiently serious to warrant intervention without special authority from a Magistrate and bring them before the court in a complete form for trial known as the *chalan*. The police also held charge of cattle-pounds, collected vital statistics, guarded treasuries, escorted treasure and prisoners, in addition to their regular duties in the repression and detection of crime.

A general skeleton of the administrative machinery has been presented above. To complete the picture, it may be stated that the Commissioner in each division had a judicial assistant who was completely independent of the Commissioner. The Judicial Assistant later on became the Divisional Judge having jurisdiction throughout the division enjoying all the powers of the present Sessions Judge. He tried all murder cases, heard appeals from convictions by First Class Magistrates and civil cases up to Rs. 5,000. There were other Courts of different grades with jurisdiction ranging from cases up to Rs. 100, Rs. 300, Rs. 500, Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 5,000, and the Deputy Commissioner, as stated above, had unlimited jurisdiction, over whom all was the Judicial Commissioner.

European and Indian troops were stationed at Sagar, Jabalpur. Sitabuldi, Kamptee and Asirgarh with cavalry and artillery, as also an Indian infantry at Hoshangabad, Raipur and Sambalpur. In 1855, the force numbered 8,120, of which 2,301 were Europeans. The yearly expenses of this force was Rs. 27½ lakhs. During the not infrequent transfers of units from one cantonment to another, there were land-marches when the troops marched by road with all their paraphernalia. Halting places on the roads, which are still extant, were reserved for their camps. It was the duty of revenue

officers to make all arrangements for the provisioning of the troops in his area. Higher posts in the Army were all reserved for Europeans and the highest post to which an Indian could rise was that of a Subedar.

In the time of Lord Ripon, Local Self-Government was introduced in urban and rural areas. The basic principles of the Resolution of the Government of India were (1) the Constitution of the local bodies upon a popular and election basis, (2) the Enlargement of their powers, (3) Selection of the Chairman by the Local Bodies themselves. The Resolution was issued in May 1882. It is curious to note that this resolution of the Supreme Government did not meet with the approval of the Government of Bombay which considered that the Municipalities and Boards were yet in their infancy and that they should not be entrusted with independent Government. The controlling guidance of the President-Collector and Assistant Collectors was, in its opinion, indispensable. The Supreme Government, however, warned the Bombay Government that there should be no interference in the deliberation of Local Bodies from the district authorities. In February 1883, Sir John Morris, Chief Commissioner of Nagpur, called a meeting of the leading citizens and announced that Government was willing to hand over the Municipal administration to elected representatives of the people if they were willing to undertake the responsibility and that Nagpur was to have the honour of forming the first municipal body. This proposal was received with enthusiastic response and B. K. Bose (later Sir B. K. Bose) was approached for accepting the presidentship. He, with characteristic modesty, declined and offered to work in the more responsible and onerous post of the Secretary. Public opinion, in regard to municipal matters in Nagpur and everywhere else was practically non-existent and few could be found to give suitable guidance in launching this experiment. Earnest persons with local knowledge desirous of justifying the trust to be reposed in them had to be selected and persuaded to take the responsibility, and Sir Bipin found men like Mukund Balkrishna Buty and Gopal Hari Bhide to help him. Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis became the first President and Rao Bahadur Bapurao Dada Kinkhede the first Vice-President.

The Central Provinces Municipalities Act, 1883, was amended in 1889, and after the reforms of 1919 was consolidated in the Act of 1922 under which all municipalities in the province are at present functioning. The first municipalities were established in Nagpur and Jabalpur. Franchise was given to graduates, barristers-at-law, pleaders, darbaris, Honorary Magistrates, etc. In Hoshangabad, Sohagpur and Khandwa, Mukhtyars and Gumastas with an income of Rs. 200 per year were also qualified. In Ramtek, Umrer

and other places, the number of ploughs owned determined voting rights. In Kalmeshwar, the voting was restricted to persons having an income of Rs. 150 per annum and above. In Nagpur, Jabalpur, Raipur, Damoh and Hatta, only persons paying house tax were eligible. In 1885, there were 61 municipalities in the Central Provinces.

By the Local Self-Government Act, 1883, District Councils and Local Bodies under their control were established at district and tahsil headquarters, respectively, consisting of elected and non-elected members. The Local Boards under the supervision of District Councils were looking after primary education, roads, water-supply, health, veterinary assistants and cattle pounds. At first, Government made grants for these works but later on a cess of 6½ per cent on the land revenue was imposed to meet the expenditure of these bodies.

Meanwhile Berar was clamouring for the establishment of Local Self-Government. Taking a bold attitude the *Warhad Samachar* expressed the popular feeling that people feared to oppose the Government officers not from any hope of advancement but fear of being removed, if they opposed the wishes of officers who nominated them. An instance was cited when in the course of discussion and in the presence of the Commissioner, female education was opposed by the officials and though it carried by the non-official majority. Complaints were made by them that the non-official section of the Municipal Committees did as they liked regardless of public interest. It had been announced in 1881 by the Berar Government that a Municipal Committee would be established in each town having a population of 5,000 people and on which five members would be appointed by the Deputy Commissioner. This Committee would look to the cleanliness and other matters in the town. There were, however, serious complaints about the personnel of these committees.

In an editorial dated the 15th January 1883, the *Warhad Samachar* stated that "it was our duty to awaken all people of Berar to make a demand for Local Fund Committees being fully administered by peoples' representation. Now the Deputy Commissioner spends local funds according to his own sweet will without caring for the public, therefore, people of various places should note that they should stand united behind the right to demand Local Self-Government. They should send their resolution to the Committee established at Akola in connection with the movement for the introduction of Local Self-Government. The people of Akola

should organise a squad of propagandists and popularise the demand in various places and should take the initiative in organizing a provincial Conference to consider the matter." Apparently as a result of this agitation, the Resident at Hyderabad called a Conference and decided finally that Berar should have elected representatives in its local bodies and the announcement was widely acclaimed.

The Municipal Act of 1883 was extended to Berar in 1887. An example of the power exercised by Government officials happened in a case at a *naka* in Amravati where the Commissioner's camels were detained by the moharrir for active duties. An acrimonious correspondence with the President led to a meeting in which the Commissioner was asked what punishment should be awarded to the *naka* contractor who had followed the rules strictly and it resulted in the abolition of the *naka* resulting in an annual loss of Rs 7,000 to the Municipal Committee.

Basim District Board was the first body of this kind, established on the 3rd December 1889. It was on the 20th January 1889 that the elected Amravati Board met under the presidentship of G. S. Khaparde. The Berar Government in its report of 1889 to 1890 referred to their work and "were glad to note that our municipalities with the new phase of elective franchise are progressing steadily and satisfactorily and are all in a financially sound state". While it is true that the Local Bodies were mainly concerned with the problem of local administration, it cannot be denied that a new sun of responsibility began to dawn on them. The electoral system laid the foundation of conscious individuality which was to develop later into a sense of power in the voters.

Prior to 1854, there was little progress in regard to education in these areas. Whatever educational effort was made was entirely under private initiative. An ill-fated attempt made in 1842 by six German missionaries to found an agricultural mission among the Gonds at Amarkantak collapsed when, with the onset of the rains in those malarious jungles, four of the missionaries died in a course of five days; the survivors with the greatest difficulty returned to Mandla. As a result of the Educational Despatch of 1854, the districts of the Northern Division were made into an education circle of North-Western Province with headquarters at Sagar and Lt. Hebbart was the first Circle Inspector. A special duty was to establish village schools in the districts of Hoshangabad, Sagar, Narsimhapur and Jabalpur for which purpose a sum of Rs. 12,000.



afterwards increased to Rs. 35,000, was granted by Government. In Nagpur, the period preceding 1862 was one of retrogression in educational matters. The schools were held—some in verandahs of shops, others in front of the teacher's house, yet others under trees or in cattle-sheds. The teachers were either too old to earn a livelihood by other means or had been failures in other avocations. Several men who had set up schools in the districts were Sepoys discharged from the Raja's army on its reduction in 1854-55. One tutor to a Zamindar was a retired tailor.

Similarly, in Chhattisgarh, Lieutenant Trevor, the first Inspector of Schools in that Circle, described a typical school as consisting of "four or five boys of one caste gathered round a decrepit old man who could scarcely read himself, a school in which the scholar, passing from the alphabet to transcribed passages from the Shastras or Quran, spells out a few pages which, daily reiterated, became a part of his memory; and a sing-song proficiency, which together with such amount of rudimentary writing as may suffice for the transactions of a village bazaar, lifts him to a level with his teachers, and puts the finishing stroke to his education".

Such was the state of affairs in rural tracts when, in 1862, the Educational Department was constituted, the first Director of Public Instruction being Captain P. Dods. It is curious that in these early days almost the entire superior inspecting staff for education was drawn from officers of the army. The material at hand being practically *nil*, the administration, aided by the New Department, had to carve out a system of its own. The main features of the system were laid down by Mr. Temple (afterwards Sir Richard). In his Resolution upon the first Report in 1863, the Chief Commissioner insists upon an active co-operation between the civil authorities, the educational officers and the people for the success of the educational system.

Long before British Government began to give any thought to education, one Pandit Krishnarao of Sagar did pioneering work to promote education as early as in 1827. In his *Khagole* (unpublished), he writes that he met that "saintly person Captain James Patton". There were nine schools in the different mohallas of the city of which two were teaching Persian, one Marathi and six Hindi, under Krishnarao's superintendence. For some time the expenses were met by subscription but later, a sum of Rs. 100 per month was paid by the General Committee of Calcutta. At that time Mr. Maddock was the Agent of that part of the country and he was sent from Sagar to Sihora in the Bhopal State, where also he started educational institutions. Mr. Patton opened a school in

Bora Patheriya and one in Raigarh, under the superintendence of Krishnarao and Lord William Bentinck came on the 3rd January 1883 and visited the house of Krishnarao and took him to Calcutta in 1834 at his own expense where he was taught English and, when departing, conferred on him on the 5th March 1835 the title of Rao Saheb and a gold medal and a village jagir. He also sent an English-knowing teacher from Calcutta to Sagar. It was from that time that teaching of English in Sagar district began which spread subsequently to Hoshangabad and Jabalpur. When the Agent at Sihore Mr. Williamson read the news he also paid the Rao Sahib a visit accompanied by the Nawab Dulla Saheb of Bhopal and took him to Sihore to show him the school there.

In 1885, there were 1,809 schools in the Central Provinces having 99,061 students. The total expenditure was Rs. 7 lakhs per year which worked out at rate of Rs. 2-0-5 per student. The income from fees was Rs. 33,428 and the student community composed of the following: Europeans and Euroseans—786, Indian Christians—556, Hindus—86,360, Muslims—7,812, Parsees—35 and backward classes—1,321 and Harijans—2,191. There were three colleges in the province having 56 students out of which 50 were Hindus. There were 61 secondary schools having 3,541 students. There were only three secondary schools for girls in the whole province having 55 students altogether. In the three training schools there were 192 students and in a girls' school there were 30. There were eleven training schools for Patwaris attended by 321 pupils and there were 319 students in 20 industrial schools. There were 1,416 primary schools having 8,588 boys and 95 girls' schools having 4,073 students.

The Education Department was established in Berar in 1866-67 and the number of schools in 1879 was 712, out of which 233 were maintained by the public. There were eleven students getting College Education who had to go out of the province, and 334 girls in ten girls' schools. In a training school at Akola, there were four students. Narayanbhai Dandekar, the Director of Education in Berar, started a Teachers' Association, the first meeting of which was held on 11th August 1883. At this meeting V. S. Mahajani pressed certain Resolutions for the Government's consideration urging help to students in the shape of scholarships and books. "There is no school in seven out of eight villages, and out of the eight students, seven are unread."

The whole system of education was so rudimentary that it was fit only for a semi-civilised, backward people; not for a land of ripe and ancient civilization which had long ago given light

and learning to the West. The new education was meant to make the people soft, docile and unenterprising. The contrast between this kind of training and the strong manlike tradition of the past is well brought out in these lines of Alfred Lyall:

*"Look" says the School Feringhee,  
    "What a silly old man you be ;  
You can't read, write, nor cypher—  
    And your grandsons do all three.*

*They will total the shopman's figures,  
    And reckon the tenant's corn ;  
And read good-books about London,  
    And the world afore you born."*

*"Well, I may be old or foolish,  
    For I have seventy years well told ;  
And the English have ruled me forty,  
    So my heart and my hand's got cold.*

*Good boys they are, my grandsons,  
    I know, but they will never be men ;  
Such as I was at twenty,  
    When sword was king of the pen.*

*When I rode a Deccani charger,  
    With a saddle-cloth gold-laced ;  
And a Persian Sword, a twelve-foot spear,  
    And a pistol at my waist.*

*My son keeps a pony  
    And I grin to see him astride ;  
Jogging away to the market,  
    And swaying from side to side."*

(Quoted by Rivett-Carnac: *Many Memories*).

There were, however, separate schools for Europeans and Anglo-Indians in which the system of teaching was different and the syllabus was according to Cambridge University. It was brought home to the students in these schools that the Europeans were the rulers and the Indians ruled.

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## CHAPTER XII

### DIVIDE AND RULE

Imperial rule since the days of the Romans has found the task of governing a conquered territory facilitated by the policy of "Divide and Rule"—"*Divide et impera*". In unity lies the greatest danger to a foreign power. As long as it can split the people into mutually unreconciled camps—the wealthy landlord against the poor and landless, the educated against the illiterate, one community and caste against the other, the princes against the people, one religion against another—as long as the people could be encouraged to wrangle among themselves, the foreign arbiter could sit securely and pretend to hold the balance even between them. During the period of the British Rule in India after the Crown took responsibility for it, if we can perceive one persistent policy running through all spheres of government, it is the policy of "Divide and Rule". In one particular sphere they carried this policy to such a limit that they had ultimately to divide the country itself. Thus, the policy of "Divide and Rule" led logically to the result of divide and quit. But, perhaps, the authors of the policy did not themselves realise at the time the possible consequences of it. Before examining how the repercussions of the policy affected communal relations in India, it would be interesting to see its application in other matters such as, the services and the Native States.

We may trace the conscious application of this policy from the years that immediately followed the Revolt of 1857, although Montstuart Elphinstone had, even earlier, pointed out that "*Divide et impera* was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours." After the suppression of the Revolt, the rulers realised that the homogeneity of the army was one of the reasons for its rising against the Government. It was felt that the high caste sepoys recruited from Oudh and North-Western Provinces, knit together in comradeship, possessing social points of contact with the higher strata of society, constituted the spearhead of the revolt. The army had, in the past, been divided according to the Presidencies in which it served. It was felt that this was a dangerous arrangement. All points of contact between the army and the people should be removed, and within the army itself any possibility of a kind of

brotherhood developing should be prevented. The defects of the pre-mutiny army were pointed out by Lawrence in the following words :—

“Among the defects of the pre-mutiny army, unquestionably the worst, and one that operated most fatally against us, was the brotherhood and homogeneity of the Bengal Army and for this purpose the remedy is the counterpoise of the Europeans, and secondly of the native races.”

Similar views were expressed in the report of the Punjab Committee on Reorganisation (1858):

“Next to the grand counterpoise of a sufficient European force, comes the counterpoise of natives against natives. To preserve that distinctiveness which is valuable, corps should in future be provincial, and adhere to the geographical limits within which differences and rivalries are strongly marked.”

The army, therefore, was reorganised. Its composition was based upon tribal, sectarian and caste distinctions so arranged that the groups retained their tribal or communal loyalties, while they were stationed in places where they could have no local contacts. It is well-known that the Bengal Army, largely composed of men from Hindustan, had taken a prominent part in the Revolt of 1857. The newly-conquered Punjab had helped the British to quell the rising. It was, therefore, decided to eliminate the Hindustani element and accord to the recruits from the Punjab a predominant place in the formation of the Indian army. The following figures speak for themselves :—

*Percentage of Men from different parts of India in the Army*

Year	N. E. India, Punjab, N. W. Frontier and Kashmir	Nepal, Garhwal and Kumaon	N. W. India U. P. and Bihar	South India	Burma	
1856	..	Less than 10	Negligible	Not less than 90	..	Nil
1858	..	47	6	47	..	..
1883	..	48	17	35	..	..
1893	..	53	24	23	..	..
1905	..	47	15	22	16	..
1919	..	46	14·8	25·5	1·2	1·7
1930	..	58·5	22	11	5·5	3·0

(Quoted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad : *India Divided*.)

Thus, we find that the region of the north-west which supplied less than 10 per cent of the recruits before the Revolt provided nearly half the number of the entire army in 1858; and if we add to it the recruits from the hills of Nepal, their combined strength stood in 1883 at 65 per cent. as against 35 per cent Hindustani soldiers. This is in contrast to the position before 1857, when the proportion of Hindustani sepoys was more than 90 per cent. So this was “the counterpoise of natives against natives”.

This policy was sought to be explained by the new-found theory of martial and non-martial races. It was said that certain classes were martial and others were non-martial. The Communities of the north-west of India were declared to be martial. The people of Hindustan (U. P. and Bihar) were not so classed. If the people of Oudh and North-Western Provinces were not considered martial classes, one might well ask, who composed the British army which had conquered, for the British, the Punjab and North-West Frontier. They were obviously recruited from the upper Gangetic Valley. Did they, then, lose their martial qualities overnight? The fact is that they were demilitarised as a result of the deliberate policy pursued since 1858. The immediate effect of this policy was to exclude very largely the people of North-Western Provinces, Oudh and Bihar from the army, bringing in their place the Sikhs, the Gurkhas, and the Garhwals.

There were many other changes introduced by the organisation of the army. The Commission on Army Reorganisation was appointed in 1879, to make recommendations regarding the proportion of the European and Indian element in the composition of the British army in India, and the means of securing a permanent superiority of the British element over the Indians. The Report of the Commission spoke of "two great principles" in this connection :

"The lessons taught by the Mutiny have led to the maintenance of two great principles, of retaining in the country an irresistible force of British troops and of keeping the artillery in the hands of Europeans."

These main principles were adhered to till the end of the British rule. The ratio of British to Indian soldiers was kept at about two British to five Indians, and the retention of the artillery in European hands remained as a permanent feature of the Indian army. By 1863, the number of European troops, which before the Mutiny was about 30,000, had increased to about 65,000, while the number of Indian troops which formerly was nearly 250,000, was reduced to 140,000. These Indian troops were predominantly Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, Jats and Dogras. The forces were thus converted definitely into an army of occupation, with Englishmen in key position, and the Indian troops so carefully arranged that they would be unlikely to combine." (Garrat: *An Indian Commentary*).

The policy of "divide and rule" was sedulously applied—though it was not so obvious—in the police force also. The Police of India had, from time immemorial, been divided into two parts—

first, the regular police appointed and paid by the State and, in all respects, forming a part of the civil establishment of the country. Secondly, a rural or village police, holding office by a quasi-hereditary tenure, not appointed by the State, but recognised by authority, and paid, not from the public treasury, but by the emoluments drawn from the villages. The police was maintained in this double form under British rule.

The organisation of the police force in the Central Provinces followed the same pattern that prevailed in the rest of India. The village police was a purely local force intended to do watch-and-ward duties in the village, and remunerated, usually in kind, by the village. In the Central Provinces, the village police was placed under the supervision of the Police Officers of the Regular Police, which was the main authority for keeping law and order and for detection of crime. The chief aim in organising this Regular Force was to fashion an efficient and reliable instrument isolated from the local population, and owing an undivided loyalty to their British employers. It was with this end in view that the bulk of the force was, as a rule, recruited from outside the province. In 1868, out of the total strength of 7,613, there were 4,468 Hindustanis and the figure is substantially the same for the year 1869. Thus, the number of recruits from North India was nearly 60 per cent. (*C. P. Police Administration Report, 1868 and 1869*).

Subsequently, a new feature of recruitment to the police was the policy of encouragement and patronage of the Musalmans. This was in fact a part of the larger policy of patronising the Muslims which became a feature of the British administration after about 1875. They decided to encourage the Muslims who had, so far, been suspect for their part in the Revolt of 1857. The Muslims, now, became the object of special attention and favour. This is partly due to the attitude to the Musalmans popularised by Hunter, and the loyal support afforded to the British by Sir Syed Ahmad. The British, therefore, decided to demonstrate their solicitude for the loyal Musalmans by selecting them to fill such posts as their educational backwardness warranted. Thus, we find a rise in the figures of recruitment of the Musalmans in the police force. The following figures are taken from the Central Provinces Police Administration Reports :—

Year	Officers		Men	
	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu	Muslim
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1882 .. ..	823	468	4864	2370
1883 .. ..	841	451	4959	2343
1884 .. ..	835	441	4979	2398
1885 .. ..	839	448	4870	2416

The figures given above have to be studied in relation to the proportion of Muslim population in the province. While the population of the Musalmans in the Central Provinces was negligible\*, they accounted for more than 50 per cent of officers and nearly the same percentage of men in the formation of the police force in the Central Provinces. The conclusion is, therefore, obvious that the policy of "divide and rule" was practised by our rulers in this department, as in others. Our rulers did not want that bonds of sympathy should exist between the police and the people whom they were appointed to protect. The Administration Reports of the Central Provinces refer to the predominance of "foreign elements" (Report, 1870-71, para. 58) "strangers and foreigners" (*ibid.*, 1875-76, para. 23), in the composition of the police force. The British policy was, in fact, intended to drive a wedge between the people and their so-called protectors.

When the police force was reorganised after the formation of the Central Provinces, most of the officers and men were taken from the Irregular armies that were disbanded. For instance, in 1861, the entire Nagpur Irregular Force was incorporated in the Police and ceased to belong to the military force in the province. From the outset there was a sedulous attempt to create a gulf between the police and the people. Unlike the policeman in other civilised countries, in India he was anything but a friend and guide of the people. He rather represented the inexorable hand of the foreign power, to be dreaded and avoided,—if possible, to be circumvented. Inevitably, there sprang up between the people and the police an inward hostility. Thus, the average policeman, trained by his very duties and the example of his superior officers to an overbearing and contemptuous attitude to the people, developed into a particularly unlikeable character. Living away from their homes, in the midst of strange surroundings, with no points of contact with the population around them and indifferent to public opinion, the police behaved with a callous disregard for the interest of the people, with the sole aim of pleasing the British masters. That a body of men so composed and inspired could not earn good repute should surprise no one.

The police progressively acquired an unsavoury reputation for inefficiency and corruption. Perhaps, the characteristically peaceful and submissive nature of the people made the police more tyrannical. Misuse of authority and resort to methods clearly outside the law became a habit with them. The rank and file together

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\*Berar, which has a good proportion of Muslims, was not then a part of the Province.



with a proportion of subordinate officers were in those days drawn from a strata of the population not noted for character or honesty. Sir Richard Temple, who was the Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces in the early sixties, refers to this unhealthy feature:

“Service in the police has always been unpopular with natives of superior stamp, and men of character avoided entering it. Men of ability rarely entered it except with the intention of making an unlawful fortune within a short time, risking the chance of such detection as would lead to personal punishment, but quite prepared for dismissal”. (Temple: *India in 1880* p. 202).

The quality of men recruited to the police force in the Central Provinces is reflected in the Annual Reports of Administration. The Report for the year 1873-74 is at pains to play down this aspect in the composition of the police force. It says that “they have certainly many of the weakness and prejudices of the classes from which they are drawn”, and derives comfort from the plea that “this is probably true of policemen everywhere”. After endeavouring to portray the police force in the most favourable light possible, the Report comes out with bare truth thus:—

“But for those who expect paragons of perfection in a mixed body of this kind, there can be in store nothing but disappointment.”

It is hardly necessary to observe that nobody would expect the police of those days to be “paragons of perfection” but one would certainly expect from the guardians of law and order a behaviour which at least conforms to ordinary canons of morality.

The Report of 1875-76 speaks of “Corruption and abuse of power” in the police force. There is again reference to the cases “in which policemen were convicted and punished for torturing persons to extort confession”. (Report, 1876-77). Use of torture is mentioned in the Report for 1877-78 (Paragraph 15). It appears that some local officers, feeling alarmed at the frequency of such acts of indiscipline and lawless conduct of the police, tried to adopt strict measures for their suppression. But the Chief Commissioner did not approve of these measures and thought that “the superintendents punished with undue severity, and that as a necessary consequence the police service was unattractive and good men were shy of it.” (*ibid*). Officialdom sought to explain away the objectionable conduct of the police by saying that “so large a force could not be expected to be wholly free from offences against discipline

nor even from offences of a more serious character." No wonder the police inherited an odious reputation, and were the object of public condemnation during the freedom movement.

We may be certain that only a very small percentage of police-atrocities ever saw the light of day. The people, anxious to avoid the attentions of the police, thought twice before bringing to the notice of the authorities instances of misconduct of the police except when the offence was of a glaring and aggravating character. For every case of police tyranny brought to light we may suppose, there were dozens which were either hushed up or silently endured by the people, due to the fear of inviting the anger and hostility of these custodians of law. This view is supported by Sir Richard Temple who writes :

"The people were apathetic in demanding redress for injuries, in reporting crime and bearing testimony. They would condone even grievous wrongs, disavow the losses of property which they had suffered rather than undergo the trouble of attending at police offices and criminal courts." (*India in 1880*, p. 203.)

The fact was, that the police was emboldened to commit acts of high-handedness because they knew that they could always depend on the support of their foreign masters in all their nefarious doings. Rivett-Carnac, who was the Private Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, says :

"The man with a belt--the Government chuprassi with a belt, to which is attached an engraved brass-plate or *chuprass* designating his office--will probably ever remain a terror to most villagers." (Rivett-Carnac: *Many Memories*, pp. 128-129.)

The process of brutalising the police really originated from the outlook and conduct which prevailed among the British officers in their relation with the people. As is the master, so will be the servant. In his normal conduct towards the common people, one could hardly catch an officer exhibit anything like civility and courtesy. We are told that a British officer in the police, while walking along a street in Nagpur, saw a man who failed to stand up on his approach, and was properly whipped by the officer, on the spot ! Not only did the higher ranks of the Police force set an example of brutality, but they implicitly encouraged the ordinary policeman, by their connivance of his cruelties and dishonesty, even when they came to their notice. Rivett-Carnac mentions an incident of dishonesty of the police, which surely came to the

knowledge of the authorities (how else did the Private Secretary to the Commissioner know about it?), and yet nothing was apparently done.

To check the increasing number of accidental deaths resulting from persons falling into wells not in use, the Government had issued a circular to fill up all old disused wells. With a copy of the circular in hand, the Police Inspector went into the centre of the irrigated tract, and calling together the chief cultivators explained the order of the Government. He read out the part about closing disused wells, but omitted the word "disused". The villagers were much perturbed, and pleaded with the Inspector who insisted on carrying out the order. He impressed on them that his failure to obey orders would result in his dismissal and loss of pension. Then, with a sly look, he offered to help the villagers out of the difficulty provided they made adequate provision for his son to start a cloth shop, from the proceeds of which he might be able to maintain himself and his family, if he were to be dismissed. The concluding part of the narrative of the Police Inspector's chicanery is best told by Rivett-Carnac himself :

"There is, of course, so far I can see, only one way out of it, said the Inspector. For the pension I do not care so much, but I have always hoped to set my eldest son up in a cloth-business in the Sudder (headquarters) station, the profits of which would support us all. For this the sum of two thousand rupees is still wanting. With this in hand I could afford to smile at the Sahibs and their idiotic orders. Now, there are at least 500 wells in this circle ; this means but four rupees a well, do you see ? Then keep your wells going and let the Sahibs do their worst !"

After much confabulation it was determined by the headmen of the caste that the required sum should be levied and the irrigation saved.

In the police force of those days, there was the dangerous combination of dishonesty of behaviour and an unquestionable power. The following provides an eloquent commentary as to how the powers entrusted to the police were brought into operation. A contemporary account of the powers wielded by the police in the seventies occurs in the pages of a well-known journal:

"A police officer, be he constable, head constable, sub-inspector or inspector, possesses immense powers for good or evil. The liberty of the people is entrusted to him, and what does this function entail? As regards the majority of offences

under the Penal Code, he is competent to arrest *suo motu* and since his police station is conveniently distant, many miles from headquarters, he is perpetually called on to exercise this responsibility. What an engine of oppression this authority can become? Let us take an instance that is happening every day of our lives. A charge of theft or receiving stolen property is brought against some man of substance. It is supported by evidence that would break down under rigid cross-examination, and this the investigating officer, from long habit, knows. He imparts to the accused his conviction that the charge is fully proved, and informs him that it has become his painful duty to send him in hand-cuffs to the magistrate for trial."

There was no doubt about the result of this threat. Nobody was under any illusion as to the degree of vexation and insult which awaited him at the hands of the police. Men of property and substance were the special objects of their attention, but they could, if they liked, get out of the difficulty by "transferring a bag of rupees" to the police *thanedar*, who knew a hundred ways of obliging his benefactor without burning his own skin. "To save appearance he may be let go on bail, by an artfully worded report to the headquarters, which fully maintains the old police reputation for seeming to be everything while being nothing, and speedily procures his discharges from restraint." (*The Indian Observer*, December 19, 1874.)

Thus went on the corrupting process; and the police force, freed from effective restraint by the foreign exploiter who, in fact, found in it a useful tool for his own purpose became, in the eyes of the people, a symbol of tyranny and oppression. One of worst and most unwelcome forms of tyranny exercised by the police was when personal reputations were involved. As stated by the *Indian Observer*:

"It is, however, in connection with cases in which females are concerned, such as illegitimate births, miscarriage, accidental or intentional, criminal assaults, that police underlings do real business. Rich mahajans, and those who have a character for respectability or sanctity to keep up, will move heaven and earth to avert open scandal from this quarter". (*Indian Observer*, December 19, 1874).

The 'Indian' Police of those days—and almost up to recent times—was neither Indian nor police: seen by Indian eyes it was one of the worst blots on the British administration. The Englishmen themselves frankly admitted that it was almost universally

corrupt. The British historian, Vincent Smith, confesses that the police regularly used torture to extract evidence; and beating was not an unusual method for extracting taxes.

Some people may, perhaps, argue from this narrative of brutality and corruption that it establishes a strong case against the right of Indians to freedom and Self-Government. On the contrary, they constitute the strongest arguments for it, because the Indian Police cannot begin to think of itself as the servant of the Indian people until it finds itself answerable to the people for all their actions. As long as it remained a servant of autocracy, its function was to terrorise the people into submission. The villager knew very well that it was futile to complain; for, the British official tradition lived on prestige: "The Government cannot shake off the age-long tradition of autocracy, that it is above the people. It dare not admit a fault, or rebuke a subordinate for excess of zeal. It exacts loyalty from the Indian officials, and it owes them loyalty in return. It will not dismiss a reliable police officer, even when a judge has censured him in open court, merely because he has ill-used or tortured a peasant. A muzzled watch-dog would be useless." (H. N. Brailford: *Subject India*, p. 234).

There is no need to multiply instances. The result of the British policy in regard to the Police force was to make them hateful to the people of the country. An enormous gulf of dread, suspicion and hatred was created between the people and those who should truly have been their protectors and custodians. Ever afterwards the police became, to the people, the embodiment of all the cruelty and oppression of the foreign power.

Perhaps, the policy of "Divide and Rule" paid the highest dividends in the relations with the feudatory rulers and the zamindars. The British had followed a policy of annexation and expansion up to the Revolt of 1857. They lost no opportunity of enlarging the limits of British territory in India, however iniquitous and dishonest the act might be. The high water-mark of this policy was reached in the reign of Dalhousie when such large kingdoms as Oudh, Satara and Nagpur were summarily annexed and their ruling families reduced to poverty.

With the end of the Revolt of 1857, a new policy was adopted, and it was recognised that the existence of Indian States was essential to the continuance of British authority in India. The Queen's proclamation of 1858 promised that the Princes' right to adoption would be respected, and that the British Government

would not annex the territories of an Indian Prince except under the most extraordinary circumstances.

The importance of the Indian Princes in the political framework of Indian Empire was now fully understood by the British. Statesmen in England and their representatives in India looking on the events of 1857 in retrospect, had no hesitation in saying that the support of the Indian Princes was of priceless value in checking the tide of revolt and weakening its intensity: "Those, who, at Cawnpore, bore the shock of the Gwalior contingent and could thus appreciate the part it would have played if released three months earlier, must have realised that the support of Sindhia (though he had not a bayonet to offer us and could not eventually defend his own capital) contributed in no small degree to our safe passage through the crisis". (*Indian Observer*, August 29, 1874.)

The English rulers of India fully realised that even obscure chieftains, when hostile to them, became formidable enemies. On the other hand, the example of their loyalty or even inaction served to deter others, and deprived the disaffected of a convenient rallying point. The common people took their cue from the ruling prince and watched his actions as indicating the prospect of the success or otherwise of the revolt. "His adherence to our case at once lowered the tune of the preachers of sedition, disconcerted innumerable combinations, and sent a shock of disheartenment and mutual mistrust through the ranks of the revolt, while at the same time confirming the loyalty, raising the confidence and adding force to the arguments of our adherents in every quarter." (*Ibid.*)

The military assistance afforded by the Indian chiefs to the British may not have been very effective. The heart of their people was not in the British cause; but the mere fact of their not joining the rebels was a matter of no small value. It was enough that they maintained "a bold front in our behalf and kept the peace to a greater or less extent in their respective dominions."

Suppose, the Indian States did not exist. Suppose, they had been swept away and made parts of the British territory. Suppose, for example, Lord Dalhousie had been Viceroy in 1841 and had annexed Indore and Gwalior. "The consequence would have been that in the length and breadth of Malwa there would have been no chief of note when the rebellion broke out, save the Mohamedan Begum of Bhopal, to discourage the spirit of hostility to our rule then rife among all classes of people, to afford shelter to the unfortunate European refugees, and to threaten and cajole the revolted British brigades." (*Ibid.*)

Canning himself wrote in his Minute of 1860: "It was long ago said by Sir John Malcolm that if we made all India into *Jillahs* (i.e., districts under the British) it was not in the nature of things that our Empire should last fifty years; but that if we could keep a number of native States *without political power but as royal instruments*, we should exist in India as long as our naval supremacy was maintained. Of the substantial truth of this opinion I have no doubt; the recent events have made it more deserving of attention than ever."

It is in the light of their experience of 1857 that the British adopted a policy of conciliation and tolerance towards the Princes. They gave the Princes every assurance that their rights, privileges and titles would be safeguarded. The British set up the Princes as little despots ruling their petty kingdoms without external interference except an occasional reprimand from the Resident, ever watchful about the Imperial interests of Britain but totally indifferent to the welfare of the people. The inhabitants of the princely states were left to the tender mercies of a set of tyrants who were practically subjected to no restraint. The fact is that the British authority in India identified its interests with those of the rulers, who were taught to look for support to the indulgent foreigner rather than to the loyalty and affection of the people over whom they ruled. The attitude of the British overlord may be summed in the following words of the *Indian Observer*:—

"Enough for us that Native States were there, breakwaters in the strong tide-way of revolt, the accumulated power of which, if it had full unbroken sweep, would have been irresistible. Enough for us that the mere fact of their existence interested the feudatory chiefs in the *status quo*, there being no such element of precariousness or intolerableness in their position as to lead them to run unknown risks in attempting to change it."

The policy of "Divide and Rule", that of detaching the interests of the princes from those of their subjects, was adopted by the British in their treatment of smaller chiefs and zamindars as well. These feudatory chiefs and landlords in Central Provinces were of varied status and power with widely different history of relations with their overlords. Summarising their position generally, Sir Richard Temple says:

\*"On the one hand they were not sovereign, being in reality quite dependent on government, having no fixed powers of their own, but exercising, more or less of an authority by

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\*Quoted by Brailsford in "Subject India", p. 15.

sufferance or by delegation, and being altogether subject to the pleasure of Government as declared from time to time; yet, on the other hand, they are quite above the rank of ordinary subjects . . . . The tribute or revenue raised from them is net gain, free from all charge on account of cost of collections or anything else. Tracts and districts which would, if regularly managed, in many cases not even pay expenses, are really managed through the aid of these chiefs and yield profit in the shape of tribute to the British treasury."

The purpose of settling zamindars as intermediaries between the Government and the people appears to be partly to save for the government the trouble and expense of collection, and partly to serve as a buffer between the people and the Government, to take all the odium of the exaction. Col. Lucie Smith who is an authority on the Zamindari System of Chanda district, says:

"The whole weight of testimony goes to show that these Zamindars are descendants of men on whom were conferred tracts of country, more or less wild, with the object of their being brought under cultivation and order maintained. Naturally as in the case of English barons and the Scottish chiefs, while the law was weak and the administrators distant, the Zamindar as the lord on the spot exercised large powers."

During the earlier period under the Marhatha rulers, the Zamindars did not enjoy proprietary rights on the land. In fact the idea of private ownership of land was foreign to Indian tradition. But one of the important measures introduced by the British was to confer on the zamindars and malguzars the proprietorship of villages. Large number of estates were thus settled in the northern districts of the Central Provinces. Fuller's Report on the Central Provinces for 1862—1892 states:

"The malguzars were granted full proprietary rights in their villages and were converted into landlords from being revenue farmers or managers. At the present selling rates of land, the capitalised value of the grant thus made is not less than 14 crores of rupees, or, say, 10 million sterling. Moreover, instead of rendering to Government the whole of the rental of their villages, less a commission of small amount, they were left a profit of their rental incomes ranging from 55 per cent in some districts to 25 per cent in others."

\*Quoted by R. H. Craddock : Note on the Zamindars of Central Provinces.



All these concessions were granted after ousting a large number of old proprietors, mainly due to their share in the 1857 movement. And yet, Fuller says in his report,

"the value of these concessions were not appreciated at the time, and in some places it was with difficulty that persons were found willing to accept the proprietorship of villages and take up the responsibility for the payment of their revenue. Grants literally went a-begging."

With their knowledge of the part played by the barons, squires and other landed gentry in the history of England, the British Government thought that what India needed was a class of people of this kind,—a conservative rural class of rich land-owners with vested interests—who would be a bulwark of the administration. By special terms and favours to them they could be made trustworthy and loyal supporters of Government who would curb any subversive tendencies that might develop among the masses. That was what happened. "Malguzars have drifted farther from the ryots, and in great measure value their villages simply for the money they bring." (Fuller's Report.)

The Chief Commissioner of Central Provinces, Sir Richard Temple, recommended to the Supreme Government the need for vesting "the Native Chiefs and gentry with judicial powers", and supported his proposal by citing the example of Oudh and the Punjab where this principle had been acted upon, apparently, with the best effect." (Report, 1862). The system of associating these elements with the work of civil administration was also decided upon because "the system would, beyond measure, strengthen our hold upon the country." The British wanted to utilise the services of the upper classes to strengthen their sway over the country. They could use these landed gentry for making the impact of their administration felt in the remote parts of the province. Without such an intermediary, there were many difficulties in achieving this aim.

"At present the difficulty of obtaining information of the condition of affairs in the interior, of producing any real effect upon the mass of the people, of making our influence reach to remote and scattered localities in these provinces, is but too notorious. A partial remedy, at least, to these defects, will be supplied when we shall have a native on the spot, not only in every tract, but almost in every village, who has some acquaintance with our administration, some interest in its success, some responsibilities for its failure. Again, the men

thus selected will be personally bound to the government and will be obliged to defend its measures and vindicate its reputation." (Report, 1862.)

So, it was with a view to achieving this aim that the British enhanced the prestige and conferred rights upon the landed gentry. As the Report says "the system of land tenures was intended to establish and foster this class." Thus, the maintenance of the princely states and the creation of zamindaris was intended to drive a wedge in the social structure of the country by creating a class of people, specially privileged and endowed, so that they may become the supporters and stooges of the alien rule in the country.

The Britishers themselves admitted that the conquest of India would not have been possible without adopting an unscrupulous policy of "Divide and Rule". It was by setting one ruler against another, "the Nizam against Arcot, and Arcot against the Nizam ; the Maratha against the Muslim and Afghan against Hindu" that the native rulers were eliminated. The British tacitly encouraged the Wahabis to undermine the Sikhs, though, unexpectedly, the Wahabis later recoiled on the British themselves who had conquered the Sikhs in the meanwhile. After the Revolt of 1857 had been put down, the British adopted, especially in the Gangetic Valley of North-Western Provinces and Bengal, a pronouncedly hostile attitude to Moslems, the counterpart of which was a pro-Hindu policy. Lord Ellenborough had said, even before 1857, "I cannot close my eyes to the belief that this race (Muslims) is fundamentally hostile to us and, therefore, our policy is to conciliate the Hindus". After 1857, since the territories from Oudh to Bengal had been seized by the British from Muslim rulers, they had a natural suspicion of the Muslim. Therefore, the British Government, till about 1875, was inclined to treat the Musalmans as their real enemies. They hoped to encourage and set up the Hindus as a counterpoise to the Muslim. "One Governor-General even boasted that he had avenged the sack of Somnath by his destruction of Gazni and by recovering the gate of the historic temple" (Panikkar: *Survey*, p. 217). It is evident from the contemporary Hindi and Bengali literature that the people were actually led into believing that the British had rescued them from the oppressive rule of the Muslims. For instance, the famous Hindi playwright, Bharatendu Harish Chandra gives expression to the prevailing sentiment thus:

"भारत कृतज्ञी नहीं है. वह मुक्त कण्ठ से स्वीकार करेगा कि अंग्रेजों ने मुसलमानों के अति कठिन दण्ड से हमको छुड़ाया."

("India is not ungrateful. She would freely admit that the British rescued her from the extremely cruel oppression of Muslims.") As a result of this policy the Muslims in that part of the country found themselves excluded from all important employment in civil and military departments, and they further aggravated their position by the neglect of western education. They, however, found champions for their cause in persons like Sir William Hunter whose "*Indian Musalmans*" was published in 1870 ; and a few years after, the British Government began to play quite another tune

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## CHAPTER XIII

### THE ECONOMIC BURDEN

We have already seen that the turmoils of 1857-58 left a trail of heavy financial liability. The burden fell particularly on the occupiers of land, because the chief source of income for Government was still the land revenue. Mention has been made earlier of a tentative attempt to introduce the income-tax, but it was quickly dropped in 1865, and though partially restored in 1869, it did not become a normal feature of the Indian financial system till 1886. Therefore, it happened that Government had to depend largely on land revenue, and to some extent on salt duty and the opium trade, for meeting the steadily increasing cost of administration. To examine the land revenue system in the Central Provinces after 1861, it would be necessary to consider the systems that prevailed in the component units that formed the province.

The Nagpur territory, which to some extent served as the pattern for the whole Maratha kingdom, had a comparatively mild revenue assessment during the nearly hundred years of Bhonsla rule. The revenue system under the Bhonslas, though crude and elementary, was so designed as to leave the people in comfort and comparative ease. It left an adequate margin to the cultivators for their own living and the agricultural operations. We have it on the testimony of European observers like Jenkins that the Bhonslas rule resulted in the improvement of agriculture and happiness of the people. There were, of course, years of stress and emergency arising out of bad season or the visitation of Pindaris or a war which led to the increase of the State demand.

The State, however, was under British management from 1818 to 1830 during the minority of the last reigning king of the Bhonsla line. During the period of British management, the officers appointed by the Resident enhanced the assessment as they thought that an increase of the land revenue was a sign of efficient administration. So, within this period the land revenue of the State was considerably raised, and that of Chanda was practically doubled. When the British management ceased and the State was restored to the Raja on his attaining his majority in 1830, the land revenue had risen from Rs. 29,34,597-12-0 (roughly equivalent to £195,639-1-0) in 1818 to about Rs. 38,00,000, equivalent to about £253,000 (see Supplement to Jenkin's report, page 3). Though the British levied land revenue on the basis of the State demand

fixed under the Bhonsla in the most disturbed period of their history, the impact of the levy was, in practice, much heavier; because while in the time of the Bhonslas the amount of receipts was considerably lower than the demand, the British officers saw to it that the amount fixed in advance was rigorously realised to the last pie. When the Bhonsla resumed the administration in 1830, he took prompt steps to lighten the burden, and we note that the land revenue by the time of his death fell to £224,170, i.e., about Rs. 33,62,500. The State was then annexed by the British. The administration of the newly annexed State during the first eight years from 1853 to 1861 was most unsatisfactory. Short-term settlements were resorted to with great hardship to the people. This was the position in 1861 when the Nagpur State was joined to the other territories to form the Central Provinces.

The Sagar and Narmada territories, as we have seen, came under the British rule in 1818 and were placed directly under the rule of the Supreme Government, and subsequently placed under the administration of the North-Western Provinces. After a time, they were again placed under an Agent of the Government of India, but due to the disturbances of 1842, the Governor-General once again transferred their administration to the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces by whom they were administered till they were merged along with the Nagpur State in 1861 in the newly constituted province of the Central Provinces.

The early administration of the Sagar and Narmada territories was defective and weighed heavily upon the people. Here also, as in the rest of the country, the British administrators in their zeal for increasing the revenue assessed the lands too high, demanded an impossible levy which impoverished the people. Their object was to extort the maximum possible revenue, with no thought of spending reasonably for the welfare and improvement of the farmer. In the Hoshangabad and Seoni districts, the first five years' settlement made in the year 1821 "probably was the worst settlement ever made. Major Macpherson had to deal with a depopulated country and an impoverished and dispirited people"\*. The assessment was made in utter disregard of the paying capacity of the people. Major Macpherson showed no sympathy with the poor cultivators and enforced the State demand with the greatest rigour. It has been recorded that he "had chastised Hoshangabad with whips and scourged Seoni with scorpions".

The assessment fixed by Major Macpherson in 1821 was £10,359 for an area which had been assessed by the Maratha Government at £2,277 only. Another five-year settlement was

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\*Settlement Report of Hoshangabad, 1855, by Charles Elliot, paras. 46—49.

made in 1825 and the assessment was further increased to £13,877, which was seven times what the Marathas had demanded. The enormous demand could never be realised and the Government had to order remissions. "But the remissions were not sufficient, and very strenuous efforts were made to collect the revenue by any means, so that to this day a most lively recollection of the tortures and cruelties then suffered lives in the minds of the Zamindars."\* Another five-year settlement brought little relief to the cultivators. At last in 1836 a twenty-year settlement was made at a reduced assessment of £6,192, which was still nearly three times the old Maratha demand.

The Settlement operations of the Narsinghpur district tell the same story. The operations of the first settlement of this district were as bad as at Seoni and Hoshangabad. "It is no exaggeration to say that the first fifteen years of our administration were engrossed in our continuous struggle to keep together and support the agricultural community under an almost unbearable pressure of land revenue demand. Our first settlements were founded on the later Maratha assessment, which had been most unduly strained to meet an extraordinary crisis. . . . When our officers attempted a rigid system of collection on so unsound a basis . . . the impolicy of the assessment was shown by the entire desertion of numerous villagers."† The first assessment which was fixed at £66,769 resulted in great disaster. The Malguzars were ruined. In the triennial settlements of 1830 and 1833 heavy remissions had to be allowed and considerable reductions were made. During the twenty-year Settlement of 1836 the assessment was further reduced to £5,313.

As in the case of the districts dealt with above, in the district of Sagar also the long-term settlement which followed the short settlements failed to bring relief to the distressed peasantry. The settlement report of the year 1867 gives the following account of the prevailing conditions:

"The Government demands press so heavily upon the people that all enterprise has been crushed, and there is not the slightest attempt at improvement. I have personally satisfied myself that in many instances the Government demand exceeds the gross rental assets of some villages. The people have lost heart to the extent that in some instances the rightful owner of hereditary descent refused on any terms to accept the proprietary rights of villages. The widespread misery and distress throughout this sub-division of the district must be

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\**Ibid*, para. 50.

†Settlement Report of Narsinghpur, 1866, by Charles Grant, paragraph 55.

seen to be appreciated, especially at Dhamonee and part of Benaika Patna. The impressions conveyed to me on inspecting these tracts was, that the Purganas were dead, so vast was the desolation, and so scarce the signs of life or human beings.”\*

The Government of India strongly condemned this state of things at Sagar after half a century of British administration. “In 1834 they wrote the twenty-year settlement was still not sufficiently moderate; and the same benefits did not accrue from this long settlement as in other districts of these territories. Heavy reductions were granted, and the assessment was thus further reduced. It is to be remarked that although the Government of the day pressed the necessity of reduction, its orders were carried out by the local authorities with a niggardly hand, and concessions made in dribblets. Had the reductions been granted promptly, the district, it is probable, would have recovered.”†

The extracts given above amply testify to the state of the Sagar and Narmada territories during the early decades of the British rule. At first short settlements were made, and later, as a result of the efforts of Robert Martins Bird, a long-term settlement of 20 years was made in 1834. The plight of the Sagar and Narmada territories at that time was described by Bird in the following words:—

“An excessive system of grab and speculation is said to have been introduced and the cultivators rarely receive the benefit of that which is forgone by the Government, but have been forced to pay all that could be collected from them. On the other hand, a system of interference has been introduced, which, by destroying all confidence, has driven away capital from land. The stores of the merchants have been opened, and grain forcibly taken away to be given out to the cultivators for seed, without any payment being made to the merchant, or any assistance afforded him for the subsequent recovery of the property of which he has been thus despoiled.

“It is sufficient to say, that an ample collection of facts, openly stated by the Natives, and which could not be denied by the European officers, afforded abundant proof that in the vain hope of propping up an exorbitant assessment, and under the mistaken notion of practical skill in the management of

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\*Settlement Report of Sagar by Col. Maclian, 1867, paragraphs 93-94.

†Letter No. 353, dated 30th 1867, from the Government of India (Foreign Department), to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces. (Quoted in Dutt: India in the Victorian Age.)

details, a system of mischievous interference in the private arrangements which are concerns of individuals, had almost universally prevailed.”\*

On the basis of this report the Government of India passed orders for the conclusion of the twenty-year settlement. This settlement brought relief to some districts where the assessment was reduced while in other districts it brought none, because the local officers were still wedded to the principle of exacting the highest possible revenue from land. The long-term settlement lasted till 1861, the year in which the Central Provinces were formed.

When the Central Provinces were constituted, proposals for the extension of a permanent settlement to the newly formed province were considered. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Richard Temple, appeared to be in agreement with the proposal, but somehow it did not materialise. In the meantime the settlement operations, the principles of which had been laid down in a Proclamation by the Government of North-Western Province when the Sagar and Narmada territories formed part of that province, were proceeded with.

The main principle laid down by this Proclamation and afterwards accepted by the Government of the Central Provinces, was the conferral of proprietary rights upon the Malguzars or revenue-payers. This constituted a major change in the status and rights of the Malguzars. These Farmers of revenue had been appointed by Government merely for collecting the land-revenue from a certain number of villages and remitting to Government its share. They enjoyed their rights at Government's pleasure, but did not hold their estates by hereditary rights, nor did they possess the power to sell or mortgage the land. But now they were given the proprietary right on land, thus creating in India a class similar to the Barons and Squires in England—a hereditary landed gentry with vested interests. By a curious logic, it was argued that since they collected the revenue and managed the villages on behalf of the State, they should also be vested with absolute rights. Chisholm, the Settlement Officer, justified the conferral of proprietary rights by saying that “the Malguzar could not transfer his village merely because the Native Government, from a short-sighted policy, declined to recognise any absolute right in land; but while he remained in possession, he was absolute as regards all the internal arrangements of the village—settling cultivators, dispossessing them, increasing rent, planting groves, constructing

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\*Bird's report on the Sagar and Narmada territories, dated October 31, 1834.



tanks—in fact wielding all the authority in the management of the village which appertains to holders elsewhere under the most indisputable title.” In these words Chisholm, an able Settlement Officer, justified the conferral of proprietary rights on the Malguzars. It is, however, not difficult to see the real motive of the British Government in bestowing this right on the revenue-payers. They were guided by the sole intension of attaching to their rule the interests of an important and influential section. Remembering the experience of the Revolt of 1857 they were anxious to adopt policies calculated to win for their government the loyalty of the landed class.

The proprietary rights of the Malguzars having been recognised, the next question was: “What portion of their rental should be claimed as Government revenue? According to the Saharanpur rules it was decided that in Northern India the land revenue should be limited to one-half of the rental. This rule had been extended to the Sagar and Narmada territories. But what was the rule for Nagpur country which now formed the larger portion of the Central Provinces?

For Nagpur, the Government of India had sent directions to leave the Malguzars from 35 to 55 per cent of the gross rental. And it was added that the Governor-General in Council would be disposed to leave the Malguzars in all cases 40 per cent for expenses of management and proprietary rights, and to extend the limit in special cases to 50 per cent.” Richard Temple liberally interpreted these instructions and the principle of half-rental of the Saharanpur rules was laid down in the Settlement Code. The land settlement of the sixties was thus based on two principles:

- (1) The recognition of the proprietary rights in malguzars' and tenants' rights in cultivators.
- (2) The limitation of the land revenue to one-half of the rental of estates.

It must, however, be observed that the principle of half rental was not adhered to in the assessments made. The settlement officers did not accept the actual rental of the estates. They estimated what the rental should be from their own calculations, and based the State demand on them. The demand was communicated to the Malguzars who were left to manipulate their rents to the estimated rentals. R. C. Dutt rightly condemns these iniquitous proceedings by saying that

“a more reprehensible system of encouraging landlords to screw up their rents from helpless and ignorant cultivators

can scarcely be conceived. In Bengal, Oudh and in the Punjab, Lord Canning and Sir John Lawrence had striven to restrict the enhancement of rents by private landlords by special legislation. But settlement officers in the Central Provinces and elsewhere adopted a method which encouraged landlords to screw up their tenants."

The actual proportion of the rental, so calculated, which was demanded as land revenue, was also higher than 50 per cent in most districts as the following list will show\* :—

Percentage of Rental taken as Land Revenue

Seoni .. ..	..	} Under 50
Hoshangabad ..	..	
Narsinghpur ..	..	
Jabalpur .. ..	..	50
Sagar .. ..	..	51
Damoh .. ..	..	54
Mandla .. ..	..	56
Nimar .. ..	..	64
Nagpur .. ..	..	78
Wardha .. ..	..	79
Chhindwara ..	..	66
Betul .. ..	..	64
Bhandara .. ..	..	60
Chanda .. ..	..	60
Bilaspur .. ..	..	57
Raipur .. ..	..	53
Sambalpur .. ..	..	(Ryotwari Settlement).

It is thus clear that the principles laid down for the assessment of the land revenue were violated in a two-fold manner. Firstly, the rental calculated as the basis of assessment was higher than the actual rents received by the landlords; and in the second place, the proportion demanded as revenue exceeded 50 per cent of this rental in most districts, and was fixed at 78 per cent in Nagpur itself. Any ameliorative orders of the Government "were carried out by the local authorities with a niggardly hand", and the people had no redress against the violation of rules by the very officers for whom the rules were framed. The only benefit, however, the people obtained from this settlement was that it was a long-term settlement, and so the cultivators and the landlords got some respite from the harassment of previous short-term operations.

The view that the regular settlement of the sixties was unfair and pressed heavily upon the cultivators was contested by the

\*Letter of the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces to the Governor-General of India, No. 1862, dated April 11, 1901 (quoted in R. C. Dutt: *Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*).

Government of India under Lord Curzon who bent his whole weight of official machinery to refute it. It resulted in an exhaustive survey of the question, followed by the publication of the statements of the different provincial governments, seeking to disprove the claims made by R. C. Dutt to the effect that the land revenue system introduced by the British led to the impoverishment of the Indian people. The case of the Government was stated authoritatively by their experts who facilely controverted the arguments of R. C. Dutt. But facts speak louder than words. Nobody could challenge the fact that the condition of the Indian peasant under the rule of Indian princes was better than that under the British rule. On the question of excessive rent assessments, Reynolds, a former Secretary to the Bengal Government, wrote to R. C. Dutt:—

“You are quite right in putting excessive rent assessments in the foreground as a main cause of the impoverishment of India, both because it is well to concentrate attention upon our much needed reform, and because reduction of land assessment must necessarily lead to retrenchment in expenditure.”

The clearest proof of the unbearable burden of a heavy assessment under the British administration is the periodical scourge of famine which swept the country since 1860. The spectre first made its appearance in the North-Western Provinces in 1860, but luckily did not stay long. A terrible famine occurred in 1866-67 all along the eastern coast, with particular severity in Orissa. In 1868-69, there were famines in United Provinces, Rajputana and the Punjab. In 1873, northern Bihar was stricken by famine. Again in 1876, a devastating famine which lasted for nearly two years spread over a wide area, stretching from Madras. Mysore, Hyderabad to Bombay and the United Provinces. The Central Provinces had their share of this curse somewhat later, in 1896-97 and again during 1899-1900. Meanwhile, Government of India had already been forced to appoint a Famine Commission under General Sir Richard Strachey which submitted its report in 1880, making a number of recommendations for the prevention of famine and famine relief.

The British historians are in the habit of counting on the asset side,—as one of the lasting “blessings” of the administration under the Crown,—the extension of the railway system during this period; but even this was, in fact, a severe economic burden, as it turned out. Although the first railway-line was laid in the time of Dalhousie in 1848, the expansion of railways took place vigorously after the Government of India had been taken over by the Crown and Parliament. There were two main lines constructed

in the Central Provinces during this period, one running along the Nermada valley, connecting Bombay and Calcutta via Jabalpur; and the other also running east-west between Bombay and Calcutta but along Chhattisgarh, passing through Nagpur. No doubt, these rail links helped to open up the rich hinterland, but to describe them as unalloyed blessings is disingenuous. The railways were built up at a fantastic cost. Nowhere in the world did the railway cost so much per mile. It is estimated that the East India Railway cost about £30,000 a mile. Thus the railways really provided a lucrative field of investment for the British capitalists yielding a guaranteed return at a much higher rate than was ever dreamt of in any other investment, while the Indian had to pay for the extravagance.

The fantastic manner in which the public debt of India was increased during the first thirteen years of Crown administration from 1858 to 1870 placed on the poverty-stricken people of India as unbearable burden:

“The burdens that it was found convenient to charge to India seems preposterous. The costs of the Mutiny, the price of the transfer of the Company's rights to the Crown . . . wars in China and Abyssinia, every Governmental item in London that remotely related to India, down to the fees of the charwoman in the India Office and the expenses of ships that sailed but did not participate in the hostilities, and the cost of Indian regiments for six months' training at home before they sailed—all were charged to the account of the unrepresented ryot. The Sultan of Turkey visited London in 1868 in state, and his official Ball was arranged for at the India Office and the bill charged to India. A lunatic asylum in Ealing, gifts to members of a Zanzibar Mission, the Consular and diplomatic establishments of Great Britain in China and in Persia, part of the permanent expenses of the Mediterranean Fleet and the entire cost of a line of telegraph from England to India had been charged before 1870 to the Indian Treasury. It is small wonder that the Indian revenues swelled from 33 millions a year to 52 millions a year during the first thirteen years of Crown administration, and that deficits accumulated from 1866 to 1870 amounting to 11½ millions. A Home Debt of £30,000,000 was brought into existence between 1857 and 1860, and steadily added to, while British statesmen achieved reputations for economy and financial skill through judicious manipulation of the Indian accounts.”

Thus, the weight of economic burden grew heavier and heavier in many ways, so that a popular cartoon of the day represented India as a starved tottering person, bent double, on whose back rested a huge rock of economic burden, on top of which sat the well-fed, pot-bellied British *Sahib*, complete with sola topi, whiskers and rifle!



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FRUITS OF BONDAGE

While the Revolt of 1857 and its sequel produced on the British a racial arrogance, solidarity and an inveterate suspicion of the Indian, it also left on our side indelible marks which affected our outlook. It left the people in a state of frustration which, in its turn, had a twofold consequence. It drove some people back to their ancient moorings, their philosophy, religion and literature, with a greater ardour. Of these, we shall see more later. But in the case of some others it led to the growth of what was later described as "slave-mentality", an attitude of sycophancy and favour-hunting. "The great industry of the British period after the Mutiny was the manufacture of quislings." (Pannikar: *Survey of Indian History*.) It resulted in the growth of a parasitic tribe, notably among the feudal classes and among some who had taken advantage of the English education. The feudal relics who had stood solidly by the British during the turbulent months, as well as the land-holding classes set up by the Government on the ruins of the dispossessed "rebels", were anxious to prove themselves more loyal than the Britishers themselves. In order to whet their appetite, the ingenuity of Disraeli and Lord Lytton had invented an elaborate hierarchy of titles, decorations and ranks which were dangled before their greedy eyes. Rajahs, zamindars and the landed-gentry vied with each other in the scramble for glittering titles, and even the ambitious middle classes saw here a chance to become pillars of the Empire. The British rule appeared to them no burden but an opportunity and they gloried in such badges of their servitude as Rao Bahadurs and Knights of the British Empire.

At the same time, the English education which had grown in the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, following the establishment of the three universities there, created an increasing number of young men possessing an adequate knowledge of English Language who could be employed in the numerous subordinate posts under Government. By natural talents the Indian is quick to learn a new language and adapt himself to new ways. No wonder the British found him apt, efficient, and—what is more to the purpose—inexpensive. The English-educated Indian was, therefore, much in demand, and it is not surprising that in this period those who had received English education underwent an anglicisation in the process. They imitated the ways and manners

of their masters and imagined themselves to be "Sahibs" in their own right. The English set the fashion in every sphere of life and it was the ambition of the anglicised Indian to follow them.

But the anglicised Indian was left in no doubt about his true status. It became unpleasantly clear to him that neither his imitation of English ways nor even his education in England would make him acceptable to the Englishman as an equal. At every turn he was rebuffed and made to realise that his colour, race and subjection were unchangeable despite all his efforts to ape the English. The Indians soon found to their bitter cost that whatever their intellectual attainments might be, however, high and distinguished their education, they could not hope to rise above an inescapable level of subordination. This supercilious attitude was particularly brutal among the non-official Englishmen and Englishwomen, and survived till quite recent times. H. N. Brailsford tells an incident in which an educated Indian lady belonging to a highly honoured family wanted to enter a first class compartment occupied by two English women. One of them came to the door and said gruffly, "You cannot come in here". "And why?", asked the Indian lady politely, to which the other replied with rude frankness, "Because you are black and I am white." It was, however, the Indian lady who had the best of the argument, when she neatly retorted, "I prefer my colour to your manners". (*Subject India*, p. 17.)

Railway travelling was notoriously dangerous for Indians and innumerable instances might be cited of abuse and ill-treatment meted out to them by their English fellow-passengers. Instances of Indians being turned out of their places by the Guards to accommodate English passengers were a common occurrence. The evil became so common and widespread that even as early as 1866, the British Indian Association of the North-Western Provinces was compelled to present a petition bearing the signatures of 3,251 persons to the Viceroy (*vide* circular letter No. 22-Railway, from the Secretary, Government of India, to the Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, dated 2nd October 1866). The Viceroy drew the attention of the Chief Commissioner to "serious and patent defects in the administration of the Indian railways more specially in the accommodation and treatment of native passengers, who form the great bulk of railway travellers." The use of moderate language in the circular letter should not give us the impression that the evils complained of were of an ordinary and routine character. It repeatedly refers to the need of securing "the proper treatment and welfare of the native passengers." The question of the ill-treatment of the Indians in the railway trains must have assumed serious proportions. It was brought to the notice of the Secretary of State who

addressed the Board of Directors of several railway companies directing them to provide for "the protection from ill-treatment by the subordinate railway officials of the native passengers." But how well they observed this can be seen from the following incident.

During his sojourn in Patna, Wilfrid Blunt stayed with Nawab Vilayat Ali Khan, a respected nobleman of the city. The Nawab stood high not only in the esteem of his fellow-citizens but of the Government also, who had made him a Companion of the Star of India. On Blunt's departure the Nawab with thirty more of the leading inhabitants of Patna accompanied him to the railway station. When Blunt had entered the railway carriage, they remained standing on the platform in the most orderly and respectful manner. There was neither obstruction nor noise nor crowding. But the presence of "natives" on the platform became suddenly distasteful to an English passenger in the adjoining compartment. Thrusting his head out of the window he began to abuse them and bade them be off; and when they did not move struck at them with his stick, and threatened the old Nawab especially with it if he came within his reach. The arrogant and offensive Englishman showed great surprise and indignation when Wilfrid Blunt interfered, as if to say, "who are you that you should interpose yourself between an Englishman and his natural right of abusing 'natives' at will?" It was not without some difficulty that Police aid could be secured. The railway officials—and the police treated it as a matter of small importance—did their best to screen the offender and declared themselves incompetent to do more than register a complaint. (*The Indian Selector*, Vol. I No. 10, October 1884.)

The commercial classes of Englishmen, especially the planters, were the worst offenders in the ill-treatment of Indians. The story of how the European planters oppressed the peasants forcing them to grow indigo on their land will be referred to elsewhere. Over vast tracts of Bihar the peasants cultivated indigo under a system which had become an instrument of intolerable oppression. Many of the helpless peasants objected to grow indigo, on the ground that other crops paid them better. Upon this the planters forcibly seized the lands, and had them sowed with indigo by their own henchmen. The proprietors of the lands were, thus kept away from their fields by the terror of sword and cudgel. This practice prevailed unchallenged, for a long time, and the planters even defied their own Government if their high-handed action were to be questioned by an officer. They openly boasted of their power to teach a lesson to the officials of the Government, and referred to



the time when "interlopers had conquered and dismissed a Lieutenant-Governor". The fate that overtook an Englishman who rendered into English a play, *Nil Darpan*, exposing the wickedness of the indigo planters, is described in a later chapter.

A glaring instance of racial antagonism was the case of Rudd, an Englishman, who was in the service of one, Mr. Jellicoe. Rudd was desired by his master to procure a sheep for his use. He selected one from the flock of a shepherd of the name of Fazil who objected to his choice, saying, "Sir, do not take the sheep; she is with young, and I will give you another". To this piece of perversity Rudd replied by forcibly carrying off the animal. The owner followed him to the bungalow and appealed to Mr. Jellicoe, who, after hearing the story, gave back the sheep and reproved his overseer for his want of consideration. This weak and un-English behaviour of his master was intolerable to Rudd who made up for his master's mildness by manhandling Fazil, and not satisfied with that, he decided to avenge the English prestige by shooting the fellow through the back. The victim died and Rudd was put on trial and the mass of evidence being most convincing of his guilt, he was convicted for wilful murder. The most surprising aspect of the Rudd story is the total want of sympathy for the victim on the part of the European population of the country. On the other hand, they condemned the sentence passed on the murderer and presented a petition, bearing a large number of signatures of Europeans, urging the Governor-General to commute the sentence. The Indians were scandalised at the notion that a guilty Englishman must be spared simply because he was an Englishman. One of the educated Indians expressed the general feeling in a well-written article, containing the following passage :

"If the offender has deserved the extreme penalty of the law, in the name of justice and humanity let forfeit be extorted. Let blood be shed for blood. To attempt in such a case to mitigate the punishment is to attempt to pervert justice, to shake the stable foundations upon which society exists."

These expressions threw the Europeans into a state of wild frenzy and papers like the *Bengal Harkaru*, the mouthpiece of the European community, poured forth a stream of violent invective against the 'natives' who had the effrontery to demand bare justice in such a case.

The instances in which the Englishman exhibited a callous indifference to the feelings of the Indians can be multiplied. The behaviour of the ruling race, particularly during the first decade after the suppression of the Revolt, was as brutal as it was

humiliating to the Indians. But their temper did not improve even after the lapse of years when the memories of 1857 were wearing off.

The ill-treatment of Indians continued without any effective protest. They found themselves helpless and were convinced that nothing would result from taking recourse to law which was administered by English officers. Thus the estrangement between the two races increased from year to year. Writing in 1884, an English correspondent, Mr. Wilfrid Blunt, remarks:

"It is my distinct impression that the ill-feeling now existing in India between the English there and the indigenous races is one which, if it be not allayed by a more generous treatment, will in a few years make the continued connection between England and India altogether impossible, and a final rupture of friendly relations will ensue between the two countries, which will be an incalculable misfortune for both, and may possibly be marked by scenes of violence, such as nothing in the past history of either will have equalled." (*The Indian Selector*, Vol. I, No. 10, October 1884.)

The Englishman of a thoughtful disposition and reflective turn of mind perceived the growing danger of racial bitterness in India. They compared the situation in India with what the British faced in Ireland and Egypt; they pointed out the enormity of the racial problem in India and warned that it was impossible to overawe by force the population of the vast Indian sub-continent. Persons like Wilfrid Blunt foresaw and prophesied, "Let India once be united as Ireland and Egypt were, in a common sentiment of hatred for all that is English, and our rule *ipso facto* will cease. Let it once finally despair of English justice, and English force will be powerless to hold it in subjection."

Even when an Indian got himself converted to Christianity, it did not make him accepted as an equal by his fellow English Christians. For instance, Wilfrid Blunt describes:

"I remember meeting a gentleman of high position and large fortune in the Madras Presidency, who as a young man, had been an admirer of everything English. He was by birth a Brahman of the strictest sect, and had violated all the rules of his caste when he had insisted on going, at the age of twenty, to finish his education in Europe. He had even gone so far as to forsake his own creed and join the church of England, and on his return to India had married a Christian lady, and was

now living with her according to English custom as an Englishman in an English house. But the peculiarity of the case was this, that, though he had spared no pains to make friendly advances to the English of the Cantonment where he lived, he had never succeeded in being admitted at all into their society, or in being in any kind of way accepted as a person with whom they could associate. He was a man of large fortune, a member of the town council, a scholar of very considerable mental attainments, and a gentleman of blameless character. Yet he was as distinctly a pariah with a Christian English, whose customs he observed, as he had become with the oldest fashioned of the Hindu relations whom he had left. He was certainly among the bitterest enemies I met of the present system of Anglo-Indian rule." (*The Indian Selector*, Vol. I, No. 10. October 1884.)

In 1864, the Supreme Government drew the attention of the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces to the growing tendency among British officers "to maltreat natives". The following extract from the letter of the Supreme Government speaks for itself:

"A late event has brought to the attention of the Viceroy and Governor-General in Council that cases sometimes occur in which British officers have been tempted to take, at times, the law into their own hands and to maltreat the natives for trifling causes; occasionally for no reason at all. The consequences of such illegal and violent acts are not only that injustice and hardship are inflicted on individuals, but that the character of the Government itself suffers from tyrannical and oppressive behaviour of its own officers". (Bundle Correspondence Case File 17 of 1864.)

We may be sure that instances of "maltreatment" and "tyrannical and oppressive behaviour" must have assumed notorious proportions for the Supreme Government to take note of the matter.

An incident reported in the *Berar Samachar* in its issue of 6th May 1877, reveals to what insane extent this attitude can go:

"A European was walking on the road in Nagpur and taking umbrage at a Kunbi caught hold of him and commanded Ramdayal, a municipal peon who was near at hand, to cut off his head. Ramdayal was aghast at the order of the Sahib and when the latter had left the spot, he let him off. Seeing this the Sahib returned and asked Ramdayal in anger

why he had not carried out the order. Thereafter, the Sahib stabbed poor Ramdayal as a result of which he died. He was produced before a magistrate but was discharged on the plea of not being in his proper senses when he stabbed the peon."

This was not an isolated case of racial madness. The *Berar Samachar* in its issue of the 3rd September 1876, published the following account of the inconsiderate behaviour of the head of the province.

"The Chief Commissioner, Mr. Morris, one day saw an innocent unlettered Indian going to fetch water from the well situated in the compound of his bungalow. Mr. Morris challenged him upon which the poor Indian apologised and said that he would not have dared had he known that the bungalow was occupied by a Bara Sahib. Not being satisfied, Mr. Morris had him arrested and the man was produced before a magistrate who let him off. But Mr. Morris was not going to leave him at that; he ordered his retrial by another magistrate who fined him four rupees. The Judicial Commissioner, Colonel Mackenzie, before whom the case went up in appeal, acquitted the man and passed strictures upon the magistrate who had found him guilty."

Now the point of this incident is that a responsible officer like the Chief Commissioner was so callous in his treatment of a Indian whose only offence was that he wanted to draw water from the well in his compound. The *Berar Samachar* summed up its comments on this episode by saying that it was not safe to leave lakhs of people of the Nagpur province to the tender mercies of a Chief Commissioner like Morris.

Another instance of racial arrogance displayed by Englishmen towards the Indians may be cited. The victim of this misbehaviour was Mr. B. K. Bose who was subsequently honoured with a knighthood and attained a high position in the public life of the Central Provinces. Let Mr. Bose speak:

"In 1873 I went to Sagar in connection with a case. I thought it my duty to call on the Deputy Commissioner. I was made to stand in the verandah by the peon in attendance. My card was taken in and I could hear the gentleman shout to the peon that I could not be granted the honour of a *Mulakat*. I did not wait for the peon to deliver the message but at once left the place. For years after this I never visited a European officer, for I could not be sure of the treatment I might receive." (Bose: *Stray Thoughts on Some Incidents in My Life* p. 13.)

The arrogance and snobbery of the British officers was so notorious that even Queen Victoria had to comment upon the "snobbish and vulgar, over-bearing and offensive behaviour of many of our civil and Political Agents." She further deigned to instruct her Viceroy in India to see that the people of India were made "to feel that we are masters, but it should be done kindly and not offensively which, alas, is so often the case."

Thus India chewed in sullen mood the bitter fruit of bondage.

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## CHAPTER XV

### A PEOPLE IN FERMENT

The transition of India from a state of abject submission to an awareness of her greatness and rich heritage was a slow and gradual process because the British conquest of India had done greater damage to the very spirit and being of the country than any previous conquest. Karl Marx observed in 1853 with remarkable historical insight:

“All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests . . . in Hindustan did not go deeper than its surface. England had broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. The loss of his old world with no gain of a new one imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu and separates Hindustan ruled by Britain from its ancient traditions and from the whole of its past history.”\*

The impact of the British rule on the Indian people at the close of the eighteenth century had a demoralising effect. Whereas the earlier Muslim rulers like Babar and Akbar had treated with respect the learning and saintliness of India, and had been willing to be taught by the civilization of the country they conquered, the British had no use for anything Indian except in the shape of merchandise. In their eyes all things Indian bore the badge of inferiority. Thus, the first two decades of the nineteenth century not only saw the ascendancy of British power in India but also an eclipse of India's culture and civilization. A decadence seems to have set in wherever the British power spread, and it lay as a heavy pall on Indian life and thought.

The situation was thus propitious for the aggressive activity of Christian Missionaries. Their propaganda was especially centred in the large cities and in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. They were shrewd enough to realise that the most fertile ground for their work of proselytisation was the young adolescent mind. Therefore, they set up schools and colleges in the large cities aided by the encouragement of the Government. It is probable that the policy of the British was to create in the country a class of educated people moulded by Christian Missionary teachers, divorced from their own native fountains of religion and culture, and looking to the British for guidance and preferment.

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\*Quoted by K. M. Panikkar : A Survey of Indian History, Page 238.

If such was their intention they did succeed in some measure, as we have seen earlier, in creating an English-educated docile class who pitifully aped all the ways of their masters.

But this same policy of the Government and the aggressive tactics of the Christian Missionaries led indirectly to the revival of Hindu religion and the regeneration of Indian culture. Among the leaders of this movement, the foremost was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who might be truly considered the pioneer of Indian renaissance. He was the moving spirit in the rediscovery of India's ancient heritage, and the vindication of India's greatness. Ram Mohan Roy represented a unique synthesis of Eastern idealism and the humanism of the West. He met the challenge of the Christian Missionaries by asserting the fundamental truths of Hinduism shorn of many social customs and practices which, in his view, were opposed to the basic truths of religion. Thus was founded the Brahmo Samaj which was intended to be a reformed and modernised faith within the fold of Hinduism. He felt that it was only on that basis that the Hindu religion would be able to refute the claims of Christianity. In the life and writings of Ram Mohan Roy we get an idea of the fierce controversy that raged between the Christian Missionaries and the leaders of Hindu thought. Professor Max Muller relates the story of how Dr. Middleton, the first Bishop of Calcutta, tried to convert Ram Mohan Roy to Christianity. Having spoken at length on the truth and excellence of his religion the Bishop proceeded to point out to Ram Mohan the honour and the repute, the influence and usefulness which he could acquire if he became a Christian Apostle of India. Max Muller narrates how "Raja Ram Mohan Roy expressed his bitter indignation that he should have been deemed capable of being influenced by any consideration but the love of truth and goodness, and he never afterwards visited the Bishop again".

Ram Mohan Roy was primarily an intellectual and a rationalist. His efforts to rid Hinduism of many irrational practices and customs, like the caste system, *sati* and other vulnerable features, were based on a humanistic and liberal approach to religion which the common people could not appreciate. To them his movement appeared to be outside the traditional stream of Hindu thought. It is, therefore, not surprising that beyond a limited circle of the middle classes in Bengal, the Brahmo Samaj did not find much support elsewhere. It does not appear that this movement had any noticeable influence in Madhya Pradesh during Ram Mohan's lifetime or even afterwards.

But Hindu society in Madhya Pradesh, especially in its capital city of Nagpur, appears to have been sufficiently energetic to put

up resistance against the encroachment of Christian Missionary influence. It was not till the arrival of Stephen Hislop in Nagpur in 1845 that Missionary activity in this area began to be felt. Hislop was soon joined by three German artisans, Bartels, Apler and Voss. Hislop sent his two colleagues, Apler and Voss to Sirabuldi "with instructions, if possible, to make it a base of operations against Nagpur city". But there prevailed in the city at that time a wave of orthodox Hindu fervour directed against some persons who were engaged in violating the caste observances. This heterodox behaviour was the result of a widespread belief that the time had arrived for the advent of the incarnation of Kalki. The rules and injunctions of Hindu religion were broken by many persons in preparation for this advent, and the orthodox section of society was horrified at such outrageous sin. Much excitement prevailed, and the violators of caste rules were punished and persecuted. It was in the midst of this commotion that Apler and Voss arrived to commence their Christianising operations. They too were naturally dubbed as 'Kalkees', violators of Hindu observances, and shared the fury of orthodox Hindu society. One day Voss was severely belaboured and returned from the city "with mark of four large stones on his hat". They gave up, for the time being, their operations in the city of Nagpur, but the mission established at Kamptee proved more successful due to its proximity to the cantonment.

It appears that Hindu society in Nagpur and in the larger towns of Madhya Pradesh stoutly resisted the proselytising activities of the missionaries. This opposition sometimes took a merciless form, as when a Maratha convert reached the door-steps of his village home in a dying state, the members of his family allowed him to die in the cow-shed as an ex-communicated person, rather than desecrate their house by taking him in. A few months before the death of the last Bhonsla ruler of Nagpur, the Christian mission declared their intention of converting a person named Ganu Lingappa. Hislop requested the Resident, Mansel, to secure from the Raja 'liberty of conscience' for his subject. The Resident sought an interview with the Raja for this purpose but before they had come to a decision Ganu Lingappa was received in the Mission House. The popular fury was so great that the Mission House was surrounded and attacked. The missionaries who faced the angry crowd were severely dealt with and the Mission House was seriously damaged. It is said that even some sepoy and policemen joined in this demonstration. The British Resident was in high chagrin and held the Raja's Government responsible for the damage done to the Mission House and the injuries sustained by the missionaries. The Raja's Government quietly paid one thousand rupees damages as an atonement for what had been done.



To the rather militant Hindu sentiment that prevailed in this province, the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, and of the Arya Samaj founded by him, had an immediate appeal. A Sanyasi of Gujarat deeply read in the Vedas, Dayanand Saraswati believed in an aggressive and dynamic Hinduism as the only reply to the aggressive Christian proselytisation. The teachings of Arya Samaj sought to establish Hinduism purely on the teachings of the Vedas. They rejected many of the later accretions to Hindu legend and theology. The Arya Samaj asserted the superiority of the Hindu faith over all other faiths, and met the onslaughts of rival religions in an open polemical battle. This movement gave an effective fighting spirit to Hinduism, and indirectly strengthened the nationalist movement in its resistance to foreign rule. In Madhya Pradesh the Arya Samaj had a fair support from the time the first Samaj came to existence at Bombay in 1875. Swami Dayanand visited Jabalpur in the early seventies and stayed with the father of the late M. K. Golwalkar. But the Samaj was formally established in Jabalpur only in 1895. Of all the religious movements that aimed at the revival of the Hindu faith, the Arya Samaj had the most influence on the political life of the country. Branches of the Samaj were established in some important towns in Madhya Pradesh and they served as the nucleus for national movements especially in the form of opposition to anything which injured the honour and culture of Hindus.

But Arya Samaj had its limitations. Its repudiation of several tenets and practices of Hinduism outside the Vedas, and its opposition to idol-worship made it somewhat ineffective among the traditional Hindu society. But, on the other hand, the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and even more, the fiery and eloquent propagation of Hindu faith by his famous disciple Vivekananda gave to Hinduism what it had long needed, namely, a vigorous and convincing championship of its lofty teachings in their authentic texts. With the remarkable success that attended the lecture tour of Vivekanand in Europe and America, Hinduism may be said to have come into its own among the religions of the world. The services of the Theosophical Society and of Annie Besant but helped forward the world recognition of Hindu teachings. Branches of Ramakrishna Mission and of the Theosophical Society were established in Nagpur by the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps for the first time in many centuries, Hinduism could look the world in the face and be proud of itself. This in its turn added to the stature of Indians who began to realise that they possessed a spiritual heritage which even the European world was forced to admire.

While these revivalist movements were opening out to the minds of Indians a vision of the greatness and uniqueness of their heritage, the disillusionment and rebuffs which they had to endure in political and official life roused in their minds keen bitterness. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 had permitted the Viceroy to nominate non-officials as members, and three Indians had been chosen for this honour, but they were all drawn from the Indian nobility—the Maharajah of Patiala, the Raja of Benares and Sir Dinkar Rao—who hardly had any voice of their own. The reactionary regime of Lord Lytton clamped on the country two outrageous measures, the Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act which placed Indians in an invidious position. Though the Civil Service Act of 1870 allowed a limited number of Indians to be admitted into the Indian Civil Service, there was consternation among the Englishmen at the sacred ranks of the steel frame being violated by the incursion of "natives". The earliest to enter the Service was Satyendranath Tagore, brother of the Poet. The success of a few Indians, in spite of almost insurmountable difficulties placed in their way, so unsettled the Englishmen that the upper age-limit for admission to the Service was lowered from 23 to 19, thus making it all but impossible for Indians to compete in England. Lord Lytton was frank enough to confess that by this step "we have broken to the heart the hopes held out to the ear." For years afterwards one of the major grievances voiced in the Indian press and from the platforms of public bodies was the injustice of the virtual exclusion of Indians from the higher services. The British Indian Association, founded in 1851, was the most important body of public men, counting among its members some of the best known leaders of the country including Dadabhoi Naoroji and Surendra Nath Bannerji. This body submitted a Memorandum of grievances to the British Parliament, prominent among which was the exclusion of Indians from the higher administrative posts.

Thus the resurgence of the Indian mind following upon the growth of revivalist movements, coincided with the increasing awareness of India's grievances among the educated classes. These classes had, in fact, begun to function as the mouthpiece of the people of India, the virtual makers and exponents of public opinion, from as early as the third decade of the century. With the collapse of the 1857 Revolt, and the disappearance of the feudal leadership, it was this educated middle class fired by patriotism and spirit of independence, that naturally assumed the leadership. They became the spokesmen of the people, they gave the lead to public demands, and it was from among them that the founders

of the Indian National Congress sprang up. Ram Mohan Roy himself came from such a family, and so did all the great leaders—lawyers, teachers, journalists—who lent splendour to the early years of the Congress movement—W. C. Bonnerji, G. K. Gokhale, R. N. Mudholkar, Surendranath Banerji, Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya and many others.

In the eighties of the nineteenth century, India was thus in ferment. The four years of Lytton's high-handed rule was followed by the comparatively benign administration of Ripon. In many ways it was an atonement for the injustices of the previous regime. Ripon repealed the Vernacular Press Act; he formulated a policy of local self-government, and introduced a system of competitive examinations, open to all, for filling certain number of posts in the higher branches of the subordinate services. There was much public appreciation of the good work done by Ripon, and the leaders were led to entertain high hopes of a new and progressive era in the British rule of India.

But then came the agitation against the Ilbert Bill. But before the loud and organised protests by the Anglo-Indian community in India against the Ilbert Bill taught us the effectiveness of this form of political agitation, the Indian public in Calcutta had already demonstrated the impressiveness of such a protest. It was in 1883 that Babu Surendra Nath Banerji was sent to jail on a charge of 'Contempt of the High Court', for having condemned in strong language the conduct of Mr. Justice Norris of the Calcutta High Court in ordering the idol of Shri Shaligram to be brought for his inspection in the High Court. The news of his imprisonment created a profound impression not only in Calcutta and Bengal but throughout India. In Calcutta, the Indian shops were closed and business was suspended in the Indian parts of the town, not by order or by organised effort, but under a spontaneous impulse which moved the whole community. Students went into mourning. The demonstrations held in Calcutta were so large that no hall could find space for the crowds that sought entrance. The bazaars were utilised for this purpose, and the eager masses joined in their thousands. An upheaval of feeling so genuine and so widespread as that which swept through Bengal in 1883 was never again witnessed till we come to the agitation for the modification of the partition of Bengal. These demonstrations left an enduring impression on the public life of the country.

It was later, in the time of Lord Ripon, that the introduction in the Supreme Council of the famous 'Ilbert Bill' raised a storm of opposition from Europeans, and the controversy raging round it helped to intensify the growing feeling of unity among the Indian

people. The Bill aimed at no sweeping changes. It provided that Indian judges, in up-country districts, should have jurisdiction over Englishmen, a jurisdiction long ago fully granted in Ceylon with no ill results, and also granted in India in the Presidency towns. The only province which would at all have been seriously affected by the Bill was Bengal, where the English planters saw in it a check to their system of managing and mismanaging their coolies ; a system which consisted in an indiscriminate and brutal beating of the coolies by the planters at their will. The pith of the matter was thus expressed by a planter. "It is all nonsense", he said "to suppose you can get on without an occasional upset with the 'niggers', and our English magistrates understand this. But if we had native magistrates we should be constantly run in for assault." The Anglo-Indian community formed their defence association with its branches in different parts of the country. They raised over Rs. 1,50,000 to protect what they conceived to be their interests and to assert their special privileges. Their organisation and their resources were able to secure success to their cause. The educated community all over India watched the struggle with interest. Watching the Ilbert Bill agitation, with all its fluctuations taking place before their eyes, they could not remain insensible to the lesson that it taught, of combination and organisation, a lesson which in this case was enforced amid conditions that left a rankling sense of humiliation in the mind of educated India. It was, however, fruitful of results. It strengthened the forces that were heading towards the birth of the Congress movement. At Calcutta, a conference was held at Albert Hall lasting for three days, creating immense enthusiasm and earnestness, at the end of which everyone seemed to have received new light and inspiration which, in the words of Sir Surendra Nath Bannerji, was the reply of educated India to the Ilbert Bill agitation, a "resonant blast on their Golden trumpet".

It is necessary to take note of another important factor which contributed to the growth of public agitation and a vocal public opinion. The Press in India, which since the beginning of the nineteenth century had made tentative beginnings, grew into prominence only during the period of free expression permitted to it by Metcalfe. Its growth was soon interrupted by the events of 1857. The role of the Press in the great revolt cannot be easily assessed. The Rev. J. Long, a champion of the Indian Language Press, has, however, said that "had the Delhi Native Newspapers of January 1857 been consulted by European functionaries, they would have seen in them how the Natives were rife for revolt, and were accepting aid from Persia and Russia". He calculated six million readers

for the six thousand copies of the hundreds of Bengali books published in 1857—at the rate of ten per book. Of the newspapers printed for sale, he estimated nearly 3,000 copies with thirty thousand readers at approximately the same rate. The number of newspapers published in the North-Western Province grew from year to year before 1857. It may be remarked that these newspapers were encouraged by the Government which purchased a large number of copies, since the Press in the North-Western Province was subjected to a careful scrutiny in the pre-rebellion period and instances of criticism of the policy of the Government or its officers were very infrequent.

The Revolt of 1857, however, changed the whole situation. British officials demanded either the total suppression of Indian language newspapers or the establishment of rigorous censorship. Thereupon, Lord Canning enacted a law “to regulate the establishment of printing presses and to restrain the circulation of printed books and papers”. The reasons advanced by Canning for this enactment are significant:

“I doubt whether it is fully understood or known to what an audacious extent sedition has been poured into the hearts of the native population of India within the last few weeks under the guise of intelligence supplied to them by the native newspapers. It has been done sedulously, cleverly, artfully—so grossly, that with educated and informed minds, the very extravagance of the misrepresentation must compel discredit. In addition to perversion of facts, there are constant vilifications of the Government, false assertions of its purposes and unceasing attempts to sow discontent and hatred between it and its subjects”.

The enactment did not “draw a line of demarcation between European and Native publications” though it was “not especially levelled at the European press”. The law applied “to every kind of publication whatever the language in which it may be printed, or the nature of the persons who are responsible for what is put forth in it”. The Governor of Bombay, who had little justification for complaint against the Press in that area, came out with a strong note supporting the imposition of restrictions with the avowed object of strengthening the hands of Canning against possible opposition from England or in India to the proposed law.

So the Act No. XV of 1857 was put on the statute book. Its aim was to restrain the circulation of printed books and newspapers. The Act prohibited the keeping or using of printing presses without a licence from the Government which assumed discretionary

powers to grant licences and to revoke them at any time. It conferred on the Government wide powers to prohibit the publication or circulation of any newspaper, book or other printed matter. No distinction was made between publications in English and in the Indian languages. It was applicable to the whole of India and its duration was limited to one year, i.e., till 13th June 1858.

The new Act brought trouble to many newspapers. The *Bengal Harkaru* lost its licence which was, however, later restored. The editor of the *Friend of India* was warned for publishing an article on the "Centenary of Plassey" on the ground that it was a dangerous and provocative article. Many Indian editors came within the orbit of this act. The printers and publishers of *Durbin*, *The Sultan-ul-Akhbar* and the *Samachar Sudhabarshan* were charged before the Supreme Court with publishing seditious libels. The charge against them was, however, not proved. The *Gulshan-i-nau-bahar* ceased publication on its press being seized for the publication of "malignant" articles in the newspaper.

As pointed out above, the Press Act of Lord Canning was a measure of universal application and did not exempt the English language newspapers from its operation. This gave the Europeans great offence and they petitioned the Queen for his recall on the ground that his policy was weak and vacillating. The European community thirsted for a policy of retribution which found naked and shameless expression in the columns of the Anglo-Indian newspapers. But this section of the Press was muzzled for very good reasons. The character and tone of its writing, according to the Commissioner of Revenue for Patna, "are much more likely to endanger the stability of the Government than any amount of abuse, whether of the measures or of the members of the Government. The Anglo-Indian Press excited disaffection amongst large masses of the population and had the tendency to convert what is now a military revolt into a national rebellion." The Anglo-Indian Press, it must be borne in mind, was curbed by the Government in its own interest and not in pursuance of a policy of equal treatment towards the Press in India as a whole.

In 1861, a sensation was caused in the newspaper circles by what was known as the 'Nil Darpan' case. 'Nil Darpan' was a Bengali drama on the subject of indigo plantation in Bengal. It was translated by Rev. J. Long into the English language and widely distributed among the officials of Government. The European community took umbrage at it and the planters sued the translator and printer for libel in the Supreme Court. The printer was fined and the translator, Rev. Long, was fined as well as sentenced to a month's imprisonment. This case was furiously

commented upon in the columns of the Press, both Indian and Anglo-Indian.

Canning's Press Act was valid only for a year. After the lapse of the Act the Press again grew in numbers and importance. The *Hindu Patriot*, founded in 1853, attained circulation and influence in the post-1857 period. Its editor, Harishchandra Mukherjee, wielded a powerful pen and conducted the paper with great ability. He was described as "a terror to the bureaucracy as well as to the White colonists and planters in Bengal". The Indigo agitation found zealous support in the columns of this paper and it was as a result of the writing of Man Mohan Ghose in it that the Indigo Commission was appointed. Man Mohan Ghose regularly attended the sittings of the Indigo Commission and published full reports of its proceedings in the *Hindu Patriot*. The paper attracted attention by its championship of several public causes under the editorship of Krishto Das Pal who ably filled the editorial chair till his death in 1884.

Another newspaper which promoted public interest was the celebrated *Bengalee* with which was associated the name of Sir Surendra Nath Banerji. It was a weekly paper and was conducted by Sir Surendra Nath at considerable sacrifice and with no small difficulty. This paper was conducted on independent lines, and on occasion differed even from its Indian contemporaries. The famous *Amrita Bazar Patrika* which played such a prominent role in the growth of our national movement was started in 1868 by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and his brothers. This paper was from the beginning given to rather strong and outspoken language. Justifying such writing, its editor, Sisir Kumar Ghose, says:

"They (the people) are now more dead than alive and need to be roused from their slumber. Our language has, therefore, to be loud and penetrating".

The number of Indian newspapers was gradually increasing. In 1861, four newspapers of Bombay were amalgamated under the new name of the *Times of India*. To the same period belong *The Pioneer* of Allahabad, the *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore and the *Statesman* of Calcutta were established during the period. The celebrated *Hindu* of Madras followed soon after. By 1875 there were as many as 478 newspapers in the different languages in India. The Press in Madhya Pradesh also developed during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The *Subodh Sindhu* of Khandwa, the *Nyaya Sudha* of Harda and the *Varad Samachar* of Akola enjoyed fairly large circulation and purveyed all-India as well as provincial and local news. The other newspapers published in the State were: *Nagpur News*, edited by Sitarampant,

*Tarjuman-e-Nagpur*, edited by Md. Usman in English and Urdu, *Mouje-Narbada*, an Urdu weekly edited by Abdul Karim, *Arya Vaibhava*, edited by Balkrishna at Burhanpur, and *Vidarbha* (Akola), edited by Digambar. All these were weeklies. *Saraswati Vilas* of Jabalpur was a monthly in Hindi edited by Narayanaswami.

The growth of the Indian Press with its strongly critical attitude towards the Government naturally provoked the wrath of the ruling class. An enquiry was instituted into the state of the Indian-owned Press in 1873. The findings of this enquiry which reflected the traditional official opinion, were in favour of restrictions. The policy of muzzling the Press was strongly supported by Sir Ashley Eden, Governor of Bengal, and some members of the Viceroy's Council like Sir Alexander Arbuthnot. They demanded a more effective law than what was available in the shape of the Act of 1857 and the section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. The Government of India also had the support of almost all the Provincial Governments.

The Vernacular Press Bill was introduced in the Governor-General's Council and the rules of business of the Council were suspended to enable the Bill to be passed at one sitting, on the very day it was introduced, and it was placed on the Statute Book, as Act IX of 1878. The objects of this law were to place the newspapers published in Indian languages under "better control" and to furnish the Government with more effective means of punishing and repressing seditious writing calculated to produce disaffection towards the Government in the minds of the ignorant population.

It would appear that the first inspiration for this invidious legislation came from Sir Ashley Eden, who was chagrined at the outspoken criticism of the British in *Amrit Bazaar Patrika*. Having failed to win over the paper to his side, he meant to take his revenge by gagging it by the Vernacular Press Act. But the *Patrika* got the better of Sir Ashley, by transforming itself overnight into an English newspaper just before the Act was passed. Thus it was able to escape the clutches of the law and of Sir Ashley!

The Government defended this wholly unjust law by an argument which is surprisingly crude in its logic. Speaking in the Legislative Council, Sir Ashley Eden said:

"The papers published in this country in the English language are written by a class of writers for a class of readers whose education and interests could make them naturally intolerant of sedition; they were written under a sense of responsibility and under a restraint of public opinion which do



not and cannot exist in the case of the ordinary native newspaper. It is quite easy and practicable to draw a distinction between papers published in English and papers published in the Vernacular, and it is a distinction which really meets all the requirements of the case, and should not be disregarded merely because some evil disposed persons may choose to say that Government has desired to show undue favour to papers written in the language of the ruling power".

The Vernacular Press Act was comprehensive and rigorous. It empowered any Magistrate of a district, or a Commissioner of Police in a Presidency town to call upon the printer and publisher of a newspaper to enter into a bond, undertaking not to publish a certain kind of material, to demand security and to forfeit, if it was thought fit, such presses and confiscate any printed matter as it deemed objectionable. No printer or publisher against whom such action was taken could have recourse to a Court of Law.

Indian public opinion protested vigorously against this iniquitous measure. All the powers and eloquence of Surendra Nath Banerji were directed to expose its injustice. Even Gladstone spoke against the principle of this Act. The working of this law was as ruthless as the authors of the Act could have desired. Several newspapers ceased publication. Many were asked to furnish security. From the volume of opposition that all this created in the country, and even in a section of English opinion, it was clear that the Vernacular Press Act was not likely to remain long on the Statute Book. When Gladstone became Prime Minister and Lord Ripon came out as the Viceroy, and even before the retirement of Sir Ashley Eden, the repeal of this Act had become a foregone conclusion. Early in 1881, the Secretary of State for India wrote to the Viceroy expressing the view that "there was nothing to show that the law which infringed the principle of equality of all classes of Her Majesty's subjects in India, had been accompanied by increased security to the Government or other compensating advantages". He advised the Viceroy, therefore, to amend the Penal Code and not take recourse to exceptional measures.

The Vernacular Press Act was repealed without discussion on December 7, 1881. Speaking on the occasion, Lord Ripon remarked that "it will always be a great satisfaction to me that it should have been during the time that I held the office of the Viceroy that it should have been removed from the Statute Book". The episode of the Vernacular Press Act demonstrated again the value of organised and effective public agitation to gain public ends.

PART TWO

Petitions and Protests



## CHAPTER I

### THE BIRTH OF THE CONGRESS

The events of the decade which ended in 1885 inevitably helped the coming into existence of the Indian National Congress at the end of that period. We have seen how the reactionary regime of Lord Lytton roused countrywide discontent, while his ruinous adventure in Afghanistan imperiled the economy of the country at a time when widespread famine had devitalised the people. The collapse of the country's economy during a period of less than a hundred years of British rule created an appalling distress among the people and demolished the morale of the producers of wealth. A country which had been in the forefront of the textile trade became an exporter of raw-cotton to be processed in the mills of England. The cotton and silk fabrics of Nagpur, which had captured distant markets of Egypt and Europe were killed by the competition of machine-made goods imported duty-free. The official Settlement Report of Nagpur states in 1869:

"Some of the ordinary sorts of cloth peculiar to Nagpur and Oomrair (Umrer) have now been imitated in England and are actually sold here at much lower prices than their local prototypes. There seems to be a growing preference (because sold cheaper) for English goods, and already many of the weavers, weary of competing any longer, have betaken themselves to more profitable employment. On the whole, then, although the manufacture and export of home-made cloth is still briskly maintained, it is probable that in the natural course of things, the trade must decline, and perhaps eventually disappear."

The sad tale of the impoverishment of the cultivator has already been told. Sir Henry Cotton wrote in 1885:

"There is no great harm in saying that the land belongs to the State, when the State is only another name for the people. But it is very different when the State is represented by a small minority of foreigners who disburse nearly one-third of the revenue received from the land on the remuneration of their own servants and who have no stake in the fortunes of the country." (*New India*, p. 53.)

Out of the mouths of their own countrymen a damaging verdict on the British rule in India can be pronounced. It is a confession of failure in the elementary functions of Government that

at the end of three-quarters of a century, the condition of the country was one of utter desolation. A British educationist, who had intimate knowledge of this country, though somewhat lacking in an understanding of India's past, has stated, "It is not that we have not won the hearts of these people; we have not even satisfied their hunger. Whether or not the country as a whole, as some maintain, is growing richer, there can be little question that for the great mass of its inhabitants distress and hunger are no farther from them today than they were of old. The one aim that Britain sets before herself in the governance of lands like India and Egypt is the bringing to them of a material contentment. If she has failed to accomplish that she can boast of no success. And certainly in India she has not succeeded" (Macnicol: *Making of Modern India*).

While famine raged in a large part of the country, Lord Lytton held the vainglorious Durbar in 1877 for the purpose of carrying out Disraeli's flamboyant idea of proclaiming the Queen as Empress of India. But even of evil things some good may sometimes emerge. The pompous assemblage of princes and nobles that gathered at Lytton's court gave Surendra Nath Banerjee the idea of a large national assembly representing the people of India for the purpose of voicing their grievances and needs. The previous year, in 1876, he had taken the initiative in forming the Indian Association, a body of public-spirited men from the educated middle class which, Surendra Nath hoped, would succeed in achieving three main objects, namely, the creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country, the unification of all classes of the people of India on the basis of a common political aspiration and the awakening of the masses from their state of stupor and poverty.

As the years of Lytton's unblest regime dragged on, bringing in its wake a trail of oppression and misery, public opinion steadily grew in intensity and volume against the evils of his administration. The agitation against the Vernacular Press Act, the protests against the disastrous extravagance of the Second Afghan War and the opposition to the lowering of the age-limits for admission to the Indian Civil Service roused the people throughout the country. The last of these causes for agitation made Surendra Nath Banerjee undertake a hurricane tour of the country from Lahore to Bombay, and thence to Surat and down to Madras in the south, galvanising the people by his oratory. It was a unique success. Sir Henry Cotton has recorded how "during the past year the tour of Bengali lecturer lecturing in English in upper India, assumed the character of a triumphal progress; and at the

present moment the name of Surendra Nath Banerjee excites as much enthusiasm among the rising generation of Multan as in Dacca."

The Indian Association was one of the earliest forums of public opinion established in the country. Others sprang up afterwards: the Presidency Association in Bombay which was later replaced by the East India Association of which Dadabhai Naoroji was the moving spirit; the Mahajana Sabha of Madras; and the Sarvajanik Sabha of Poona. It was a little later that the Lok Sabha was established at Ngpur with branches in some other towns of Madhya Pradesh. All these bodies consisted of cultured and educated persons belonging to the comparatively well-to-do middle class, constituting the intelligensia of the country into whose hands the leadership of the country inevitably fell, following the collapse of the feudal aristocracy after the 1857 Revolt. These men were far from being radicals in thought and outlook. Any idea of removing the foreign rule from India was far from their minds. They saw the places of power and office held by Englishmen and wanted only that these should be accessible to Indians also. They saw that the Legislative Councils established by the 1861 Act were overwhelmingly composed of foreigners and desired that there should be a leavening of Indian element in them. In short, they were willing to accept as inevitable the fact of the foreign rule and the structure of British administration, but urged that the sons of the soil should be permitted a share of the offices and a voice in the counsels of the Government. Thus began the era of petitions and protests, led no doubt by men of high ability and persuasive eloquence, who put their faith in the essential good sense and fairness of the British as much as in the justice and reasonableness of their demands. One of the earliest petitions of this period was the All-India Memorial addressed to the House of Commons asking for an upward revision of the age for admission to the Civil Service and for holding simultaneous examinations in India and England for recruitment to the Civil Service. In 1879, the Indian Association sent one of their prominent members to England to back up this memorial by personal pleading before the English electorate.

Whether these pleadings had any effect, or whether it was due to the fiasco of the Afghan War, the Conservative Ministry of Disraeli was defeated at the general elections, and in 1880 a Liberal Government under Gladstone was formed. Lytton left India and was succeeded by Lord Ripon. The remarkable change which came over the Government of India under Ripon has already been referred to in an earlier chapter. Here it is only necessary

to point out that both the positive and the negative effects of his regime led to the strengthening of political thought and organisation among our countrymen. Positive measures like the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act and the formation of Boards of Local Self-Government, however imperfect and ineffective the latter might be, helped the growth of political consciousness. Negatively, the failure of the Ilbert Bill and the successful agitation organised against it by the Anglo-Indian community demonstrated the potentiality of this form of political action.

From all these, India took her cue for the new phase of her freedom struggle, and in 1883, the very year of the Ilbert Bill, a Political Conference was called at Calcutta at which Surendranath Banerjee urged the need for establishing a national body which would serve as the forum for voicing India's grievances. Writing about it from his personal recollection, A. C. Muzumdar says:

"It was a unique spectacle of which the writer of these pages still retains a vivid impression, of immense enthusiasm and earnestness which throughout characterised the three days' session of the Conference, and at the end of which everyone present seemed to have received a new light and a novel inspiration". (Muzumdar: *Indian National Revolution*.)

Similar conferences were held in Madras under the auspices of the Mahajana Sabha, and in Bombay by the Bombay Presidency Association.

Meanwhile, Lord Ripon, frustrated in almost all his good intentions, finding himself not well supported by the Government in England, resigned his office before his full term was over and returned to England, "a defeated, if not a disappointed man". Time and again, during the British period after the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the bureaucracy has successfully resisted any attempt at liberalising the administration. Against the firmly entrenched, and generally reactionary bureaucracy, no Viceroy, with his short term of office, could accomplish much, granting that he desired to do so. The British officer had a rooted idea of his own superiority over the Indian, that he belonged to a race "whom God has destined to govern and subdue". Lord Roberts states this view unequivocally:

"It is this consciousness of the inherent superiority of the European which has won for us India, however well-educated and clever a native may be, and however brave he may have proved himself, I believe that no rank which we can bestow upon him would cause him to be considered an equal by the British officer."

This attitude of the British rulers on the one hand, and the demand of the Indians for gradual infiltration into the higher ranks of the Services on the other, account for the character of the resolutions adopted by the Indian National Congress in the first few years of its historic career.

When the successor of Ripon, Lord Dufferin, arrived in India in 1884, the stage had been set for ushering in the Congress. It only needed the initiative of a person who could gain for the Congress the goodwill, if not the support of the gods of the Government. Luckily, in A. O. Hume, a retired civil servant, an eminently worthy person was found to take this initiative. Hume has been described as the father of the Indian National Congress. It might perhaps be more appropriate to describe him as the midwife who officiated at its birth. It was he who met the new Viceroy soon after his arrival in India and unfolded to him his ideas about a national convention. He looked upon it as a kind of safety-valve to let off popular discontent which might otherwise be pent up and burst in undesirable forms. Hume is said to have obtained "unimpeachable evidence that the political discontent was going underground, and that he actually had in his possession reports of seething revolt incubating in various districts". Lord Dufferin gave a patient ear to the proposals, evinced much interest in the formation of a national convention so that "public men in India should meet yearly and point out to Government in what respects the administration was defective and how it could be improved".

Thus fortified by the approval of Dufferin, who, however, insisted that his support should not be given publicity as long as he was in India, the notice convening the Indian National Union, as it was then called, was sent round. It was originally intended that the Conference should meet at Poona in December. But, as it happened, a few days before the dates announced for the conference, some cases of cholera occurred in the city and it was thought prudent to shift the venue from Poona to Bombay. Here it was that the historic meeting took place. "At 12 noon, on December 28th 1885, in the Hall of the Gokuldas Tejpal Sanskrit College, the First National Congress met. The first voices heard were those of Mr. A. O. Hume, the Hon. Mr. S. Subrahmanya Aiyar and the Hon. Mr. K. T. Telang who proposed, seconded and supported the election of the first President, Mr. W. C. Banerjee. A solemn and historic moment was that in which the first of the long line of men thus honoured by the mother land took his seat to preside over her first National Assembly."\*



One can see at once that the scope and purpose of the first founders of the Congress were modest in the extreme. They could not realise that they were the unconscious instruments of the forces of History who were being called upon to lay the foundations of a National organization which was destined to raise our nation from bondage and set us on the paths of freedom. Their demands were few and could have been easily satisfied. The demand for raising the upper age-limit for admission to the Civil Service, and for simultaneous recruitment in England and in India, which had been agitating the country for some time, were naturally included in the Resolutions passed by the Conference. Another resolution pleaded for the reduction of military expenditure and for the abolition of the India Council in London. The objects for which the Congress was established were defined as the "promotion of personal intimacy and friendship among all those who were striving for our country's cause in various parts of the Empire, the eradication of all narrow prejudices among the lovers of our country and an authoritative expression of the mature opinions of the educated classes in India on some of the more important and pressing social questions of the day".

The first meeting of the Congress was in the nature of a dedicatory session, attended only by seventy-two delegates. It would appear that no delegate from Madhya Pradesh was present because the invitations had been issued only to organised Associations and political bodies existing at that time, and Madhya Pradesh probably did not have any. For the Second Session at Calcutta invitations were received by some persons in Madhya Pradesh. B. K. Bose who had been invited could not attend as he had been appointed a Judge of the Small Causes Court at Nagpur, but his friends Bapurao Dada Kinkhede, Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis and Gopal Hari Bhide attended the Congress session. So did Abdul Aziz of Kamptee who made a fine speech in Urdu at the session.

The return of the delegates from Calcutta gave an impetus to the efforts of Krishna Rao Phatak who had been labouring to start a Sabha on the lines of the Sarvajanik Sabha of Poona. An organization known as the Lok Sabha was established at Nagpur with Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis as President and Bapurao Dada Kinkhede as Secretary. In 1886, a similar Sabha was established at Amravati also with Deoras Vinayak Digambar of Akola, G. S. Khaparde, R. N. Mudholkar, M. V. Joshi and Kazi Badruddin of Malkapur among its members.

Another important organization founded at about this time was the Gorakshan Sabha which had considerable political

influence though primarily intended to preserve the cattle-wealth of the country. When Swami Dayanand visited Nagpur and Jabalpur in 1884 he had suggested the establishment of such a body. It was soon taken up with enthusiasm and a Gorakshan Sabha was formed in Nagpur on 1st July 1888. Within a year as many as forty-nine Sabhas were formed at different places in Madhya Pradesh, and the Gorakshan Sabha assumed gradually an All-India form, counting among its members B. G. Tilak, M. M. Malviya, D. M. Petit and many prominent members of the Congress.

It is a fact that for some time all national activity derived its strength and its active workers from the Indian National Congress, and the annual sessions of the Congress reflected accurately the reactions of the educated people to the policies and measures of the Government. Within the first four years of the existence of the Congress it increased so greatly in its influence that the attitude of the official world towards it underwent a sharp change. Although there were in the Congress a few important Englishmen two of whom, Hume and Wedderburn, were retired civil servants, the influence of the bureaucracy was once again decisive and it succeeded in converting the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin. He who had on his arrival in India given all encouragement to Hume to start the Congress now looked upon it with suspicion, and at a farewell banquet held in his honour he had the ill-grace to describe the Congress as seditious. This change is an indirect tribute to the strength of the organisation.

As a result of this official ill-will, the fourth session of the Congress held in Allahabad was faced with great difficulties. Obstacles were placed in the way of the Reception Committee from the very beginning, and it was with difficulty that they could even secure a place for holding the session. Persons who attended the Congress sessions became victims of official persecution. One common form of oppression was to demand heavy security for good behaviour without any charge being made. A person who had attended the Third Session of the Congress held at Madras, in defiance of his district officer, a rabid anti-Congressman, was asked to furnish a security of Rs. 20,000 to keep the peace. He decided that it was safer to pay it than to challenge it in a court of law and thus provoke the greater wrath of the officer. In Berar, a warning from Government sources had been sent to patels, patwaris and Deshmukhs asking them to keep aloof from the Indian National Congress and its activities.

The Conservative Government of Salisbury in England and the bureaucratic suspicion in India brought about a frigidity in the attitude of Government towards the Congress. This is best

revealed in the reply that Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy, gave to the question about Government servants attending the Congress session. He said :

“The Government of India recognised that the Congress movement is regarded as representing what would in Europe be called the advanced Liberal Party, as distinguished from the great body of conservative opinion which existed side by side with it. They desire themselves to maintain an attitude of neutrality in their relations with both parties, so long as these act strictly within their constitutional functions. The Government of India considers the Congress, to be a constitutional body, and the position of the Congress *vis-a-vis* the Government, was parallel to that of the opposition in England, and the Government of India was strictly neutral”.

This is a significant exposition of the viewpoint of Government in regard to the Congress. A cleavage is recognised between the Congress movement and “the great body of Conservative opinion” between which the Government professed to occupy a position of ‘benevolent’ neutrality. But, as Sastri says in his account of the Congress, “Neutrality is a difficult virtue to preserve towards persistent critics”. Official hostility to the Congress grew in proportion to the criticism, however mild, of Government policies voiced at the Congress sessions, and the Government found it desirable to bolster up “the great body of conservative opinion” to serve as a counter-poise to the Congress. The Anglo-Indian Press inspired by the official view carried on a campaign to minimise and ridicule the influence of the Congress, describing it as a “microscopic minority”, characterising the delegates who gathered together annually as “dreaming idealists, impotent sedition-mongers, self-constituted delegates, disappointed place-seekers, pretentious body of irresponsible agitators”, and by such other choice epithets. The Congress was thus gradually driven to a position where it could no longer invoke the blessings of the providential connection between our country and England, nor adopt the customary resolution of thanks to the Imperial Queen. But the Congress moved only very gradually—too slowly for the liking of some members—to this position. Even in the Calcutta session of 1890, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, the President, made a point on referring to the blessings of the connection between England and India. After refuting Lord Salisbury’s absurd view that Government, by representation, did not fit eastern traditions or eastern minds, by quoting an English authority, Chisholm Anstey, “that the East is the parent of municipalities, and that local self-government, in the widest acceptation of the term, is as

old as the East itself", Pherozezshah Mehta made a fervent appeal to England:

"History teaches us that such has been the law of widening progress in all ages and in all countries, notably in England itself. That function and that duty, which thus devolve upon us, is best discharged, not in times of alarm and uneasiness, of anger and excitement, but when the heart is loyal and clear and reason unclouded. It is, I repeat, the glory of the Congress that the educated and enlightened people of the country need to repay the debt of gratitude which they owe for the priceless boon of education by pleading and pleading temporarily for timely and provident statesmanship. I have no fears but that English statesmanship will ultimately respond to the call. I have unbounded faith in the living and fertilising principles of English culture and English education. All the great forces of English life and society, moral, social, intellectual, political, are, if slowly, yet steadily and irresistibly, declaring themselves for the choice which will make the connection of England and India a blessing to themselves and to the whole world of countless generations. I appeal to all true Englishmen—to candid friends as well as to generous foes—not to let this prayer go in vain."

It is worthwhile at this stage to recall the administrative changes that occurred in the country during the first five years of the existence of the Congress. The years that followed the regime of Lytton till the passage of the Councils Act of 1892 were years of bureaucratic triumph. The government was run by the senior British officials who by the natural law of seniority were promoted as members of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Though the Viceroy, generally chosen from the ranks of British aristocracy, came armed with powers far surpassing those of a British Prime Minister, the limited period of his assignment and the weight of opinion of the senior officials rendered him largely an instrument in the hands of the Executive Council whose wishes generally prevailed. There were, of course, exceptions of a domineering and energetic Viceroy like Curzon who could override and dictate to his Council. But generally it was the official view that prevailed. The position was not materially affected by the Act of 1861 by which a few Indians were nominated to the Legislative Council of the Viceroy and to the Provincial Legislative Councils at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Therefore, when the finances of the Government suffered a serious set-back as a result of the costly Afghan War and the famines, not to speak of the increasing costliness of the administrative machinery, it was the wooden bureau-

cracy that decided the measures of taxation to make good the losses. From about 1873 onwards the value of the rupee began to fall steeply. This in its turn increased the so-called home-charges and debt payments in terms of rupees. The abolition of the import duty on cloth in order to satisfy the greed of Manchester and Lancashire closed up one source of the already inelastic revenues of the country. The result was that by a Vice-regal ordinance that salt tax was enhanced in 1888, and the income-tax was reimposed. At the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1890, Gopal Krishna Gokhale spoke on the resolution on salt tax pointing out that "the enhancement of the tax by an executive order was unjust and impolitic and the consequences had been disastrous and unjust, because in 1886 the income-tax had been brought forward on the ground that the masses were paying more than their due share of tax, and yet it was on them that a new burden was laid. The consequence was that the people had used in three years 26 lakh maunds of salt less than they would have used at the previous price, and this was taken from the very poorest, those who lived always on the borderland of famine". All that was asked for was that the duty on salt may be reduced from two rupees eight annas to two rupees per maund, but even this modest demand was not accepted. The salt tax and the income-tax, however, were not enough to support the crumbling rupee value and the finances of Government, so that it was found necessary in the time of Elgin to impose a general duty of 5 per cent on all imports. The Lancashire clamour at once became loud, and the Government of India bowing to their wishes, imposed a balancing excise duty of the same amount on the cloth made by Indian mills to offset the import duty. Thus was the Indian fiscal policy made to play the hand-maid to Lancashire interests.

The official report of the Calcutta session of the Congress of 1890 concludes with a comprehensive indictment of the bureaucratic rule, and sums up the main grievances of the country at the time:

"Although our present Viceroy seems not only desirous of seeing and judging for himself, but thoroughly imbued with the true spirit of liberalism, although in every province there remain still some faithful few, who deprecate and deplore all the evil that is on foot; although throughout Great Britain signs appear that, here and there, her people are commencing to realise the grave responsibility in regard to India which has devolved upon them, the administration of India still remains, alas! as a whole, 'linked with some virtues but a thousand crime'. Millions of educated and patriotic men are

treated as political helots to gratify the class prejudices and *amour propre* and fill the pockets of a handful of bureaucrats, the average men amongst whom are, positively, less qualified for rule, in India, than a very considerable proportion of those whom England permits them to misgovern.

India's people, free-born British subjects, are denied the smallest fraction of those fundamental political privileges which, as British citizens, are their inherent birthright. 95 per cent of all the most important and responsible offices in the country are monopolised by Europeans, on salaries fully double of those that would secure quite as, in many cases far more, competent Indians for the majority of these posts.

One-fifth of the entire population tremble on the verge of starvation, to perish by millions whenever the smallest natural calamity of drought or flood increases by one iota the insecurity of their position, and the money wrung from our pauper population, by the cruel taxation of the first necessities of life—the money which is all our Government has had to show for the 20 odd millions who in recent years have succumbed to famine and its consequences—is ruthlessly squandered in bloodshed, and in wicked, and idiotically mismanaged, aggressions on feebler neighbours, to gratify the ignoble cravings for personal distinctions and titles of individual members of a Simla cabal.

Almost every indigenous art and industry had been crushed, and agriculture, the one art on which now depend nearly 90 per cent of the population, is slowly deteriorating under a grasping rack-renting system of temporary settlement and, with it our crops and our cattle.

The masses are being persistently demoralised ; despite the distinct orders of the House of Commons, an iniquitous system of excise, calculated to stimulate drunkenness and all its attendant crimes and vices, is still retained, only slightly and superficially reformed in some Provinces, in all its original inequity in others.

Under a barbarous and obsolete system, miscalled justice, Executive and Judicial, Fiscal and Police powers are so combined in one functionary, that powers professedly granted for one purpose are practically utilised in furtherance of others, for which no civilized Government in the world would, nowadays, dare to confer them.

There is practically no justice in India for the poor against the rich, or the non-official against the official, and the police.

who should be the protectors of the poor and the honest, are their terror and their worst oppressors."

An important change which came over the nature of the demands made in the early sessions of the Congress is noteworthy. We have seen that the first few sessions had urged the need for the appointment of Indians to the high offices in civil government. But it was soon realised that far more important than a few high posts was a voice in the legislature of the country. Surendranath Banerjee, writing in his autobiographical survey, *A Nation in the Making*, emphasises this demand:

"In the sixties of the last century, and even earlier, the efforts of our national leaders were directed to securing for the people of India an adequate share of the higher offices of trust and responsibility under the Government. The Queen's Proclamation of 1858 had stirred their ambitions in this direction, and in season and out of season they pressed for the redemption of the pledges contained in that message. But the ground was now to be shifted . . . The efforts of the last few years had stirred a strange and hitherto unfelt awakening among our people and had created new hopes and aspirations. It was not enough that we should have our full share of the higher offices: but we aspired to have a voice in the councils of the nation. There was the bureaucracy. For good or evil, it was there. We not only wanted to be members of the bureaucracy and to leaven it with the Indian element, but we looked forward to controlling it, and shaping and guiding its measures, and eventually bringing the entire administration under complete popular domination . . . Along with the development of the struggle for place and power to be secured to our countrymen, there came gradually but steadily to the forefront the idea that this was not enough, that it was part, but not even the most vital part, of the programme for the political elevation of our people. The demand for representative Government was now definitely formulated, and it was but the natural and legitimate product of the public activities that had preceded it."

The demand for representative institutions began to take shape fairly early in the career of the Congress. During the fifth session held at Bombay in 1889, Charles Bradlaugh, who was known as 'Member for India' in the British Parliament, brought to India a Draft Bill prepared by him for the reform of the Legislative Councils. In support of the Bill Eardley Norton, Pandit Ayodhya-nath and Pandit Bishen Narain Dhar emphasised the elective

principle. "Given the principle of election we shall have the right to control ourselves. We shall have the right to criticise the Budget, and last, but not the least, we shall have the glorious privilege of interpellation, a right which, if properly applied, will redound to the enormous benefit both of the rulers and the ruled." Bradlaugh introduced his Bill in the House of Commons in 1890, and this in its turn compelled the British Government to bestir themselves and introduce an official bill, which they did in a form far less liberal than Bradlaugh's Bill. At this stage Bradlaugh died in 1891, and the Government Bill was put through under the name, the Indian Councils Act of 1892.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the Council's Act so drastically watered down the elective principle that the process was hardly distinguishable from nomination. It increased the number of non-official members in the Provincial Legislative Councils; and these non-officials were to be "recommended" by the municipalities and district boards for nomination by Government. Similarly, five more non-officials were added to the Governor-General's Legislative Council, and these were to be "recommended" one each by the four Provincial Councils of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Agra, and one by the Chamber of Commerce of Calcutta. Thus the Act carefully avoided any appearance of an elective principle, and official spokesmen were particular to emphasise that the change did not signify any suggestion of a parliamentary system for India. The Act remained on the Statute Book as a small vestige of the brief interval of Liberal Government under Gladstone and Rosebury that intervened from 1892 to 1895 in the otherwise unrelieved Tory regime of Salisbury which beginning in 1887 continued for nearly seventeen years till 1904 culminating in the apotheosis of Curzon's rule. We owe to this long regime of Tory reaction the emergence of the militant and extremist school of nationalism in the Congress.

Before tracing this new development it is necessary to review the first Session of the Congress held in Nagpur. It was in 1891 that the Congress met in this city—the seventh in the series of Congress sessions—and was attended by 3,812 delegates of whom 480 were from Berar. The session was held in a beautiful pavilion at Lal Bagh and was presided over by P. Andanda Charlu. The worsening poverty of India continued to be among the subjects foremost in the minds of the delegates. This was further accentuated by the drain of wealth involved in the ambitions of the British in their frontier policy. Ever since the failure of the Second Afghan War, the British were trying to re-establish their influence in



Kabul. Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan described himself as a goat tied between the lion and the bear. From about 1888 onwards with the return to power of the Tory Ministry in England under Salisbury, a general "forward" policy was adopted at the cost of India's finances. The Nagpur Session of the Congress viewed this policy as injurious to the country. Speaking on the subject Pringle Kennedy urged that instead of a "scientific frontier", they should remember the words of Lord Derby, that "a full treasury, a prosperous and contented people—these are the real defences of the country." In poignant words Mr. Kennedy pleaded that "millions have not, from year's end to year's end, a sufficiency of food. From one day to another they do not know, what every one of us knows every day of his life, what it is to have their stomachs full."

Another aspect of India's poverty figured in the discussions on the use of foreign-made articles. We shall see later how the cult of Swadeshi contributed a powerful stream to the mighty waters of the freedom movement. At the Nagpur session it had already begun to exercise the minds of the leaders, in the context of India's poverty. In a fervid and picturesque speech in Urdu, Lala Murlidhar asked—

"What are all these chandeliers and lamps, and European-made chairs and tables, and smart clothes and hats, and English coats and bonnets and frocks, and silver-mounted canes, and all the luxurious fittings of your houses, but trophies of India's misery, mementoes of India's starvation? Every rupee you have spent on Europe-made articles is a rupee of which you have robbed your poorer bretheren, honest handicraftsmen, who can now no longer earn a living".

Then, changing into a vein of sarcasm, he went on.

"Of course, I know that it was pure philanthropy which flooded India with English-made goods, and surely, if slowly, killed our every indigenous industry—pure philanthropy which, to facilitate this, repealed the import duties and flung away three crores a year of a revenue which the rich paid, and to balance this wicked sacrifice raised the salt tax, which the poor pay; which is now pressing factory regulations on us, to kill, if possible, the one tiny now new industrial departure India could boast. Oh, yes, it is all philanthropy, but the result is that from this cause, amongst others, your bretheren are starving"

Another important resolution which had special reference to Madhya Pradesh, dealt with Forest Laws. The forests have always been an important source of revenue in this State. At the same

time, they constitute a national wealth part of which, by tradition and local custom, had been utilised by the villagers for common purpose. The forest laws restricted these privileges, deprived the villages of much pasture land, denied to the ryot a source of livelihood and caused much public distress. Speaking on this subject, a delegate at the Nagpur session, said:

“With a single stroke the legislator’s pen, the Forest Laws have extinguished the communal rights of the ryot—rights which have been enjoyed from time immemorial—rights recognised and respected by former Governments, and even by the British Government in former times. By the extinction of communal rights village society has been revolutionised. Under pressure of necessity they are driven to infringe the all-embracing Forest Laws and thus stand liable to criminal prosecution. For petty infringements of these vexatious forest ordinances, thousands of criminal prosecutions take place.

The Forest Laws have done more than anything else to alienate the peasantry from British rule: the salt tax was bad; the Assessment Settlements were cruel; but the Forest Laws stung at every point, and the unhappy peasant, doing as his fore-fathers did for countless generations, found himself hauled up as a criminal. In 1890, the Government had raised in one district in the Madras Presidency a lakh and a half from pasture fees, and three and a half lakhs of rupees as penal fees by impounding cattle for trespass on the confiscated communal lands. S. B. Bhare and other speakers detailed how the cattle were starving because of the forest administration, which would not even open the old grazing land temporarily, and peasants were giving their cattle away for a song (an anna or so). Forests, jungles, wilds, gave things men wanted, fuel, wood, grass, stones, earth, leaves, bark, roots; all had been taken from them, not by God, but by an avaricious man. For hundreds of generations they had enjoyed these unchallenged, and now they were deprived of what nature gave them. Forests were blessings in the days of Hindu and Muhamminadan rulers; now they were curses. His land was on the hills, but he could not use forest, brush, scrub, though they were his own. He might not use leaves from his own trees, though he had grown. Where might his cattle graze? The forest reserves were not fenced, and cattle trespassed, and the owners were fined. A villager, having no doctor, tried to gather medicinal herbs, was fined; the herbs were all in the forests.

Other resolutions related to the complete separation of executive and judicial functions, the fundamental reform of Police administration, increased expenditure on all branches of education."

The Nagpur Session of the Congress gave a great stimulus to the national movement in Madhya Pradesh. Most of the English-knowing persons—pleaders, land-holders, professional men—attended the session, and every one seemed to be inspired with the idea that he had come to Nagpur for the sake of the Nation and returned filled with the zeal to serve the nation's cause

The first seven years of Congress existence already revealed that it was an organic and vital institution possessing the capacity for growth and adaptability. One can see in these few years an ideological development. From ventilating popular grievances and asking for some places in the higher ranks of service for Indians, the Congress had begun to assert certain fundamentals of national growth. The demand for representative institutions, for a share in the deliberations of the legislature and the recognition of the importance of the elective principles were taking the national organisation onward in the path of constitutional agitation. It is true that the Congress was anxious to affirm its loyalty to the British rule. It looked upon British connection as an indirect blessing to the country. It extolled the political maturity and wisdom of England from which India had much to learn. It depended upon the sense of justice and enlightenment of the British Parliament for its constitutional progress. The leaders of the Congress quoted Burke and Mill in support of their case, and based their demands on texts drawn from England's thinkers and men of letters. Britain could find no impressive answer to the argument that a desire for greater freedom was the inevitable product of our deep and continued study of Britain's own writers and philosophers, that it was indeed the noble consummation of their rule in India, devoutly to be wished by the ruler as well as the ruled. As an unanswerable argument this is of course very sound. But to go further, and believe that India's freedom movement was the consequence of studying Milton and Macaulay, Burke and Mill, is to be guilty of self-deception. A nation in bondage does not need to be taught the value of freedom. The hungry man need not be told the value of food. The resistance to subjection and the thirst for freedom are the attributes of the spirit in man. The pioneers of India's freedom struggle did not believe that they learnt these lessons from books. The leaders of 1842, and again of 1857, conducted this struggle in one way. Those who now inherited the

leadership were, most of them, eminent lawyers and intellectuals. Their armoury of advocacy contained subtle and powerful shafts which the Arms Act could not deny nor the thick skin of bureaucracy wholly resist. Persuasive, dignified, sweetly reasonable—all the efforts and eloquence of the Congress in the early years were directed to win their end by fervent appeals. It was only when total frustration befell them in this attempt, that other paths, less smooth, had to be chosen.



## CHAPTER II

### THE YEARS OF PETITIONING

The Council Act of 1892 proved to be the proverbial mouse born of mountainous labour. Even so, it is perhaps the first important result that the petitions and protests of the people of India produced in the British Parliament. It will be recalled that the Congress Session of 1890 at Calcutta decided to send a deputation to England to press the demands of the Indian people for political reforms and to represent views of the Congress to the British public. Each of the members of the deputation, among whom were Hume, Surendranath Banerjea and R. N. Mudholkar, bore his own expenditure on this visit. From all reports it appears the deputation made a good impression wherever they went. They addressed meetings in many towns of England, Wales and Scotland. They were able to win the support of Gladstone to a Bill which conceded the principle of representation to the people of India. One of the memorable meetings addressed by the deputation was a meeting of the Oxford Union where Surendranath Banerjea made so impressive a speech that, contrary to expectations, the meeting voted in support of the Indian demand. The following passage is typical of the whole speech:

“The statement has been made in the course of this debate that the Indians before the advent of the English were a pack of barbarians or semi-barbarians: I believe that was the language that was used. Let me remind this House that they came—the Hindus of India, the race to which I have the honour to belong (loud cheers)—they came from a great and ancient stock; that at a time when the ancestors of the most enlightened European nations were roaming in their native woods and forests, our fathers had founded great empires, established noble cities, and cultivated a system of ethics, a system of religion, and a noble language which at the present moment excites the admiration of the civilized world (loud cheers). You have only to walk across the way, and place yourselves in the Bodleian Library, to witness the ancient records of Indian industry, Indian culture, and Indian ethics: therefore it seems to me the remark is somewhat out of place. (Cheers). If the remark was made to prejudice our claim for representative institutions, never was it more misplaced, for the simple reason that self-governing institutions formed an essential feature of the civilization of the Aryan race, and we come from the Aryan stock

(cheers). The Hon. opposer of the motion is pleased to refer to the authority of Sir Henry Maine in reference to certain quotations he has made. I am prepared to bow to that authority, and accept him as an authority on Indian matters. What does he say in reference to India? The first practical illustrations of self-governing institutions are to be found in the early records of India. Their village communities are as old as the hills. (Cheers). When we ask for representative institutions, we ask for something which is in entire accord with the genius and the temper of the people of India, in entire accord with the traditions of their history, and in entire accord with the tenor of British rule in India".

He concluded his speech with the following peroration:—

Representative institutions are a consecrated possession, which in the counsels of Providence have been entrusted to the English people, to guard that possession, to spread it, and not to make it the property of this people or that people, but the heritage of mankind at large. England is the home of representative institutions; from England as the centre, representative institutions have spread far and wide until this country has justly been called the august mother of free nations. The people of India are children of that mother, and they claim their birthright, they claim to be admitted into the rights of British citizens and British fellow-subjects. I am perfectly certain that such an appeal made to the English people can meet with but one response—a response of sympathy, and a readiness to grant it (cheers). I plead before this for justice; I plead for liberty not inconsistent with the British connection, but tending to consolidate the foundations; and I am perfectly convinced that, so long as these words, these sacred words, have any weight, any meaning, any significance, amongst Englishmen, and in this House, you will record, by an unanimous vote, an emphatic vote, your sympathy with our aspirations, our desire that India should be governed according to these eternal principles of justice and liberty, which are engraved deep in the hearts, the convictions, and feelings of Englishmen, to whatever party, to whatever creed, to whatever sect they might belong".

Such fervent pleading could not fail in its effect. The Indian Councils Bill, moved by the Secretary of State for India, Lord Cross, was passed by Parliament and received Royal assent in 1892. We have seen in the last chapter the stinting and half-hearted nature of this Act. It did not concede the elective principle. The Act was so restricted in its scope and was hedged round with so many

reservations that it proved to be a very poor substitute for what the people had asked for. And yet it marked some advance in the right direction. Public disappointment at the unsatisfactory nature of the Act was voiced by the Congress at its Allahabad session in 1892. "While accepting in a loyal spirit the Indian Councils Act recently enacted, it regretted that the Act does not in set terms concede the right of electing their own representatives." Once again the reactionary bureaucracy was able to undo the little good that the Act might have done. The Rules to be framed under the Act by the Provincial Governments were drawn up by some of the Governments in such a narrow spirit that they rendered the whole Act nugatory. G. K. Gokhale speaking at the Congress session of the following year at Lahore in 1893 said,

"If the officer who drafted the Rules for Bombay had been asked to sit down with the deliberate purpose of framing a scheme to defeat the object of the Act of 1892, he could not have done better."

Thus confined and hamstrung though the Act was, some of the distinguished Indians who went into the re-constituted Councils succeeded in placing effectively before Government the Indian point of view. Surendranath Banerjea in Bengal and Pherozeshah Mehta in Bombay were always alert to oppose with eloquence and power any measure that might come up in the council injurious to the country's interests. The Central Provinces, being a non-Regulation Province, was not asked to send a representative to the Imperial Legislative Council under this Act. But in April 1893 a public meeting was held in Nagpur at the Neill City High School at which it was decided to send a Memorial to the Secretary of State for India requesting that the Central Provinces should be allowed to send at least one member under the 1892 Act. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Anthony Macdonald consulted his Deputy Commissioners, and ultimately it was not till 1896 that the Chief Commissioner recommended the name of Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis to the Viceroy for nomination. He thus became the first person from this State to be a member of the Viceroy's Council.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was almost continuously haunted by famine. Although this was partly due to the failure of the rains in consecutive years, the major cause appears to be the unconscionably high assessments made from 1891 onwards. In this State settlement operations were carried out in that year in various districts, increasing the rentals so greatly that the cultivator could hardly pay it, let alone save anything for his use. And yet Sir Bamfylde Fuller who was responsible for the settlement, had the



temerity to say that the revenue assessments were so extremely light that large savings must have accrued, that the people were still able to meet the failure of crops, and that State relief was not needed to any large extent ! Actually, when the Chief Commissioner visited Bilaspur in 1892 a deputation of about 20,000 people waited upon him with a Memorial requesting him to revise the assessment with a view to reducing it, to introduce irrigation in rice districts and to establish agricultural banks which might grant loans to cultivators on fair terms. The misery and distress in the State were of the worst. People died in large numbers. At one stage as many as 140 in a thousand population died in some places.

The famine of 1892 was followed by another in 1894, and this was succeeded by another in 1894-95 and again in 1895-96. Human beings died like flies; cattle were decimated; villages lay deserted; those who survived lived on grass and leaves. The Sagar and Damoh districts were severely hit. A contemporary of the period has recorded that whole villages inhabited by Gonds and backward classes were compelled to starve. The Press was full of harrowing accounts of the suffering. The *Desh Sewak*, *Berar Samachar*, *Subodh Sindhu* and *Nyaya Sudha* published terrible stories of the suffering. The *Shubh Chintak* of 5th April 1894 stated how one Hariram Kurmi, a farmer who used to be prosperous in the past, went out to the field with his wife and reaped the whole day but not even a *chhatak* of grain could be obtained. The crops had been completely ruined by rust. The same paper reported another case of a whole family committing suicide because they had nothing to eat for several days.

Such was the destitution to which large parts of the country had been reduced by the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time the cost of administration and defence of the country increased enormously. During the Viceroyalty of Lansdowne and Elgin the frontier policy was draining the country's wealth. Though an uneasy peace was maintained with Afghanistan after the treaty with Abdul Rahman, the tribal region of the North-West Frontier continued to be a trouble-spot. Several reasons—partly the political movement in India, partly the defeat and withdrawal of the Italians from Abyssinia, partly the economic grievances of the Parthans—all combined to rouse the Swats, Mohmands and Afridis and other tribes against the British, and open war broke out in 1897. The Government of India rushed enormous numbers of troops to the frontier. On one wing alone 35,000 troops under Sir William Lockhart engaged the Afridis, and another equally large force attacked the Mohamands. The cost of this war was immense, and

the Indian taxpayer had to pay it. There were in the country at this time 140,000 European troops having 65,000 European officers who were all far more highly paid than the thousands of Indian troops and officers besides. At every session of the Congress fervent appeals were made and resolutions passed urging the reduction of military expenditure, but the result was only a further increase. As a 'noble' Secretary of State said in the British Parliament, "The expenditure of the Indian Government has increased, is increasing, and must continue to increase."

While the series of famines were devastating the country, the Indian currency also began to reveal alarming tendencies. As pointed out earlier silver price began to fall sharply. By 1893 Government had to close the mints for unrestricted coinage of silver. Gold coin was received in exchange for silver rupees at the fixed rate of fifteen for a sovereign. The exchange was fixed at 1 sh. 4 d. and at this rate the burden of payments to be made in England on various charges, piled up. In the face of the falling value of the rupee, Government was anxious to safeguard the interests of the already highly-paid European officers, and decided to pay them a special allowance called the Exchange Compensation Allowance which involved an annual expenditure of a crore of rupees. In addition Government also paid to the Banks in England a sum of £131,000 to offset the lower exchange. The 1893 Session of the Congress at Lahore protested strongly against this intolerable and iniquitous burden on the over-strained finances of India; but the protest had little effect.

As if these misfortunes were not enough to break the spirit of the country, another scourge swept through the western and the northern parts of India—the pestilence of bubonic plague. It appeared first in Bombay State, perhaps brought by rats in the grain-ships from Hong Kong. Panic-stricken people from Bombay city, nearly 40,000 of them, fled into the villages. Thus the disease spread into the districts. Bombay and the Punjab were the two provinces that suffered most in this pestilence. But the plague had another indirect and far-reaching consequence on the politics of the country. Its ravages in the famine-stricken Deccan brought to the fore-front one of the architects of India's freedom Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He had organised a no-tax campaign during the year of the famine, in 1896. And now a greater disaster befell them in the form of Plague. The British authorities tried to arrest the spread of the disease in the only way known to them, by putting the army on the job. The British soldier, rough and crude even in the best of times, carried out the task in his usual cavalier way, clearing the

streets, entering the houses, violating the privacy of homes, and dealt with the "natives" in a summary fashion. Anger and resentment grew. Tilak, whose *Kesari* had already become a power in the country, vehemently protested against this behaviour in his paper. And then one day two British officers who were on plague duty, Rand the Plague Commissioner, and Lt. Ayerst, were murdered in Poona. The two brothers Chaphekar, said to have been guilty, were tried and executed, while Tilak who was tried under section 124-A of the Penal Code was sentenced to eighteen months rigorous imprisonment.

It was under the shadow of this gloom that the Congress session, the thirteenth in the series, was held at Amravati. There was still considerable danger of plague infection. The Civil Surgeon of Amravati and the Deputy Commissioner advised Shri R. N. Mudholkar, one of the organisers, that it would be advisable not to hold the session there. But these objections were overcome, and the Congress was held under the presidentship of Sir Sankaran Nair. In his address as Chairman of the Reception Committee, Dadasaheb Khaparde referred to the sufferings caused to the country by nature and the British Government—famine and plague; a ruinous Frontier War; floods and fires. He also spoke of the repression that the Government had started in the country, with deportations, drastic laws of sedition, amendments of the Criminal Code giving summary powers to the police and the magistrates.

The president of the Congress also condemned the reactionary policy of Government. He spoke of the distress and anger caused by the plague measures in Poona, the forcible intrusion of soldiers into the privacy of Hindu and Mohamadan homes, and even into temples. When protests against such highhandedness were published, there was a demand in the Anglo-Indian Press for a gagging Act, but the complaints made by the people were not answered. Thus, the Amravati Session was dominated by the feelings of resentment against the oppressive policy of Government. To this period, the period of the unjust sentence on Tilak and the illegal detention without trial of the Natu Brothers, can be traced the birth of the militant and extremist school in the Congress. But of this, more later.

It was not only in blatant acts of oppression such as these that the Government roused the resentment of the people, but numerous acts of ill-treatment and discourtesy which marked the conduct of Englishmen, both official and non-official, lacerated the hearts of the people. In Madhya Pradesh, some rare appointments of Indians to senior posts were made, but that did not

absolve them from the stigma of an inferior race. Ali Muhamad was appointed the first Indian Deputy Commissioner of Mandla, But when he attempted to assume social equality with his European colleagues, he was firmly and quietly removed from his office. For a period of three months one Dr. Gokhale was appointed Civil Surgeon of Chanda, but at a Durbar at which seats for his European colleagues were placed on the dais, he too claimed a seat with them. Dr. Gokhale was never again appointed to officiate as Civil Surgeon. Even when an Indian officer was conscientious in the discharge of his duties, he earned the wrath of the Government if he happened to take action against Europeans. One Pandya Shankernath was Forest Officer at Mandla and had dutifully—though perhaps unwisely—challaned some European soldiers for shooting in the forests without a licence. The soldiers were let off, and Pandya Shankernath was severely reprimanded for doing his duty. The shock was so great that he died soon after. Such was the fate of the few Indians who were appointed to high offices. And yet the people were happy when some of the Indians were elevated to high posts. The *Nyaya Sudha* of 25th May 1892 reports a public meeting held at Wardha to congratulate two Indians appointed Deputy Commissioners. One of them was Shri Shankar Rao Chitnavis. It was in the same year that Hari Singh Gour (later Sir) returned to India after qualifying for the Bar and was appointed an Extra-Assistant Commissioner in this State. The same paper published in its issue of 17th February 1893 how at a meeting of the Sagar Municipality, the Head Clerk, Narayan Rao, happened to enter the room with his shoes on. The Commissioner was presiding over the meeting, and he turned furiously at the Secretary asking why the clerk did not leave his shoes outside; and as he looked at the humbled and retreating figure of Narayan Rao, he shouted that if he ever again dared to enter with his shoes on, he would be thrashed on his head with the same shoes! The incidents of discourtesy and racial arrogance of non-official Englishmen towards Indians of even distinguished rank were even more shocking. The *Subodh Sindhu* of 1895 reported how Mr. Justice Ranade was maltreated by a European passenger in the railway train. Justice Ranade was returning from Madras to Bombay, and at Sholapur railway station he asked his servant to make his bed on the First Class berth reserved for him. The European passenger, objecting to his sharing the compartment threw the bedding out, at which the peace-loving Judge moved into a Second Class compartment. The matter was reported to the station master who managed to find for him another first class compartment. If this was the treatment received by a Judge of the Bombay High Court, the fate of lesser mortals could well be

imagined. It is against this background of racial ill-feeling which was creating a broadening chasm between the Indians and the Englishmen that we have to view the incidents that took place at Poona in 1897. It was against such behaviour that the Indian Press, especially the powerful papers of Poona, the *Kesari* and the *Maratha* wrote bitterly.

Some missionaries also contributed their mite to this worsening situation. It is recorded that on 19th January 1895 one Mr. Evans spoke to the students of Hislop College, Nagpur, and indulged in some ridicule of the Hindu gods, Rama and Krishna. The fact that Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner, presided over the meeting made this gratuitous insult all the more reprehensible. Probably it was the presence of the head of the Province that enabled the lecturer to escape the wrath of the high-spirited students of Nagpur.

Thus several factors were jointly leading to the embitterment of the country towards the rulers. The Congress, however, continued to pursue the path of sweet reasonableness, and hoped that by persistent appeals to the good sense of the British Government they could attain their end. W. C. Bonnerji, who presided over the Allahabad session of the Congress in 1892, made another earnest appeal:

"We appeal to Mr. Gladstone, we appeal to his colleagues, to admit us into this inestimable legacy of the Anglo-Saxon race. Wherever floats the flag of England self-government is the order of the day. Wherever Englishmen have gathered together in their Colonies, be they in the frigid zones of the north, or amid the blazing heat of the Equator, or in those distinct tracts watered by the southern seas, self-government again is the order of the day. We are not Englishmen, or men of English extraction, but we are British subjects, the citizens of a great and free Empire; we live under the protecting shadows of one of the noblest constitutions the world has ever seen. The rights of Englishmen are ours. But we are excluded from them. How long is this exclusion to last? That will depend very much upon ourselves. If we are true to the traditions of the Congress, and loyal to the noble teachings of our great Chief, who, though not present in body is present in spirit with us—if we live up to the exalted standard of his noble life, if we are unsparing in our pecuniary sacrifices, unremitting in our personal efforts, then the great God who presides over the destinies of fallen Nations will, in His own due time, pour down upon us, in plentiful abundance, His choicest blessings; and though we may receive a temporary

check, and the flag we now hold aloft may drop from our sinking hands, I am confident that in the near future there will rise up others, who, more fortunately situated than ourselves, will carry that standard to victory, and establish in this luckless land those principles of liberty, which while they will serve to weld together the diversified elements of our common Nationality, will at the same time, place the Empire of Britain in this country upon the only unchangeable basis upon which it can rest, the love, the gratitude, and the contentment of a vast and immeasurable population."

It is worthy of note in this context that the appeals of the Congress sometimes did bear fruit. It will be recalled that at the Nagpur session of the Congress protests had been recorded against the high percentage of the agricultural production that was being claimed by Government, and against the rigorous forest laws. Lord Elgin, the Viceroy, was inclined to consider these questions, and at the Lahore Session of the Congress, a resolution was passed thanking the Government for reducing the percentage of the land revenue in the Central Provinces from 65 per cent to 60 per cent and for mitigating the stringency and rigour of the forest rules. Nevertheless the Congress combined its appeals with protests against what it considered as an injustice to the best interests of the country. At the Poona session of 1895, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya gave eloquent expression to this protest:

"I ask English gentlemen, I ask the people of England, to seriously consider the position in which India is placed. That position is simply this. Educated Indians, representing the cultured intelligence of the country, have been praying for an enquiry, a full and fair enquiry, into the administration of this country during the last forty years. We have impeached that administration on almost every conceivable ground. We charge the Government of England, with having saddled us with an unnecessarily costly expenditure on the Civil Service of India; we charge them with having forced upon us a crushingly heavy military expenditure; we charge them with indulging in a great waste of India's money beyond the borders of India; we charge them with want of fairness in their dealings with India in the matter of the Home charges; nay more, we charge them—the Government of India, the Government of England and the people of England with them—with being responsible, by reason of their neglect to adequately perform their duty towards India, for the loss of millions of lives which are lost in every decade from starvation, largely the result of

over-taxation and inefficient administration. We charge the people of England, because as someone has said;

Hear him, ye senates, hear this truth sublime,

He who allows oppression shares the crime.

If the English Parliament, if the people of England, who have solemnly taken upon themselves the duty of governing India, by reason of their neglect to do that duty properly, allow any loss of life to occur in India which they could prevent, they are surely answerable before God and man for that loss of life. In the face of such an impeachment, does it become the Great English people and the English Parliament to give us a lame Commission, to enquire imperfectly into one branch of this administration? Would it not become them rather to stand up, like true Englishmen, and say: "We shall face all these various charges, and either prove them to be untrue, or admit that they are true and make amends for them? The charges are not of a light nature nor are they lightly made, and if the English people do not care to enquire into them in the interests of their Empire, if they care not to do so in the interests of suffering humanity, if they do it not, even as a matter of duty, let them do it at least for the sake of the honour of England, which, I hope and trust, is still dear to every Englishman".

The years from 1896 to the end of the century were years of great stress and difficulties. As we have already seen how nature inflicted on the country the scourge of famine followed by that of plague while the folly of Government brought about the Frontier War of 1897. Therefore, when the Congress met in 1897 at Amravati, the mood of the country was one of anxiety and resentment. Bitter were the feelings of those assembled, at the brutal sentence passed on Tilak and the detention without trial of Natu brothers. The country had begun to feel in the writings of Tilak in *Kesari* and *Maratha* a new and inspiring upsurge, which stirred the hearts of the people. Surendranath Banerjee gave expression to his feeling in unforgettable words:

"We regard the imprisonment of Mr. Tilak and of the Poona Editors as a still greater mistake. For Mr. Tilak, my heart is full of sympathy. My feelings go forth to him in his prison-house. A Nation is in tears . . . Englishmen have won for themselves the Magna Charta and the Habeus Corpus. The principles which underlie those concessions are embalmed in their glorious constitution. The Constitution, I have no hesitation in saying, is ours by birthright; born British

subjects, we are entitled to the privileges of British subjects. Who will filch away these rights from us? We are resolved, and this Congress will take the pledge, you and I will enter into a solemn League and Covenant. Let it go forth from this hall, let it impregnate the public mind of India, we are resolved, by every constitutional means that may be available to us, to assert under the Providence of God our rights as British subjects, not the least important of which is the inestimable right of personal liberty."

The monsoon of 1898 having failed, famine again stalked the land, and the suffering was too fearful for words. The previous famines had already depleted the economic condition and reduced the physical stamina of the people. Things were not, however, so bad in Nagpur, Chanda, Nimar and Jabalpur districts. 691,714 persons were on relief, i.e., about 6.41 per cent of the total population were relieved by labour. How the remaining 93 per cent went through life in those days, it is not possible to describe. In 1896, the death rate was 49 per thousand, and in 1897 it was 70. Before famine, the death rate was 32 per thousand. Government spent about one crore and 70 lakhs of rupees in the famine of 1896. The famine of 1899-1900 was infinitely more terrible. In the month of August 2,322,000 people were in the labour ramps, i.e., about 21 per cent of the population. The death rate rose up to 58 per thousand, and about four and a half crores of rupees were spent in helping the poor people. Excluding the States, the population fell from 10,784,294 to 9,876,646. The population of the States fell from 2,160,000 to 1,996,000.

The Government of India appeared to have been driven to a state of panic by the events of 1897-98. Their policy was thus somewhat similar to that of the concluding years of Lytton's regime, exactly twenty years before. A sedition law was passed which gave absolute powers to the magistracy, and the Criminal Code was drastically amended. Ananda Mohan Bose, who presided over the Madras Session of the Congress in 1898, thus described these high-handed measures of oppression :

"Everyone felt his personal liberty insecure where such measures were allowed. There was the new law of sedition and the changes in the Criminal Procedure Code which placed public speakers and editors of newspapers on a level with rogues and vagabonds, liable to be called on to furnish security for good behaviour, and allowed a District Magistrate, the head of the police, to try cases of sedition."



The whole administration during the period was obsessed by two main preoccupations—the famine and plague on the one hand and the political agitation on the other. It looked as if the Bureaucracy, which had been triumphant during the long period from Lytton to Elgin, suddenly found the ground slipping from under its feet. This led to the increasing estrangement between the people and the Government, so that R. C. Dutt remarked, that he could hardly remember any time when the confidence of the people of India in the justice and fair-play of English rulers was so shaken as it has been within the last two years.

The Administration Report of the Central Provinces for the decade beginning 1892, says :

“Famine is the dominant note in the history of the past decade, and its dark shadow has been cast over almost every section of the community.”

And yet looking at the revenue collection for the year 1897-98, the year after the terrible famine, we find that the receipts were Rs. 97,32,000 as against the receipts for the year 1892-93 of Rs. 75,18,000. The figures tell their own story of extortion. The legislation enacted during the period did not help the cultivating classes. The Tenancy Act of 1898 imposed restrictions on the transfer by landlords of the cultivating rights in their home-farms and it sought to give the ordinary class of tenants fixity of tenure. But the value of landed property steadily decreased; the rate of interest rose sharply and agricultural credit almost disappeared. As a result of all these, the cultivator was reduced to most distressing straits.

The Amravati session of the Congress held in 1897 reflected all these alarming factors in this State and country. Among the subjects discussed at this session, it is interesting to notice the demand made for irrigation which would have in some measure tempered the severity of the famines. Speakers pointed out that fourteen times as much was spent on Railways as on irrigation, and if at least a part of it had been spent on irrigation schemes famine could have been reduced if not wholly avoided. It has already been pointed out at what extravagant cost the railways had been built. But the railways helped British capital and British trade, whereas irrigation would have helped only the Indian ryot. Concerning the changes proposed in the law of sedition the Congress entered a dignified protest saying,

“the changes in the law now proposed will be altogether at variance with the pledges given by Sir James Fitz-James Stephen when passing Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code

through the Council, and will deal an irreparable blow to the liberty, speech and freedom of the Press, thus retarding the progress of the country and creating terror instead of confidence in the minds of the people."

Against this background of repression and distress, it is not surprising that the administration in almost all spheres was conspicuously ineffective during the last years of the century. For example, during ten years the progress of education in Madhya Pradesh revealed only an increase from 2.4 to 2.8 per cent of the population. The problem of mass education was never seriously tackled, nor did the rudiments taught to the children remain long with them, "with nothing to read, no accounts to keep, and little occasion to write letters" (Thompson and Garrett). The district administration became stereotyped and unimaginative. In every district the European officers, who were the heads of departments, were content to keep to the set routine, and formed themselves into an exclusive class—the "white Brahmins" as they were called,—and let the district stagnate. "A steadily increasing population was pressing heavily on the soil, agricultural debt was growing, and roads were needed almost as much as schools, but little was done to improve agriculture, relieve indebtedness or develop local self-Government." (Ibid).

The average district officer generally pursued the even tenor of his life unworried by the deteriorating condition of the district under him, until something unexpected or violent occurred. His touring was invariably combined with shikar. Those shikar parties were a source of great trouble to the people who had to provide *rasad* and *begar* (free rations and labour). This evil practice grew to such proportions that during the years of famine Government had to issue special instructions to the district officers *not* to demand from the people *begar* and free supply of rations. Even so, the burden was heavy enough. A Chief Commissioner on tour travelled with a small army of followers. Travelling was done by horses, some of them drawing carriages. A large number of bullock carts was pressed into service to carry a varied assortment of household effects and office requirements. They were usually accompanied by the lady members of the family and children, with their ayahs, nurses, peons, cooks, khalasis, mashalchies, sycces, grass-cutters and the camp followers. Sometimes the Chief Commissioner was accompanied by the Chief Secretary and the entourage became proportionately larger. To these were added the Deputy Commissioner, Tahsildar, Naib-Tahsildar, with all their office and domestic attendants, and some minor revenue officials

like the Revenue Inspectors and Patwaris. Besides, there was, of course, a full complement of police for messenger and guard duties. The medical attendant and all his staff had also to accompany this caravan. This considerable army would move from place to place, and preparations for its reception and accommodation had to be made at each camp weeks ahead. Stocks of foodgrains, fuel, ghee, oil, grass for horses and all the multifarious articles needed for this large population had to be anticipated and provided by every officer who aspired for promotion. The young Tahsildar's attitude was, "Perish India but the Commissioner's camp must not be short of potatoes". Cases were fixed for hearing at the camps, and naturally the litigants also followed. The tours of the Deputy Commissioners, Assistants Commissioners and of the District Superintendents of Police were also similar, only slightly less spectacular and somewhat smaller in size. All these tours were combined with shikar, and the strain on the population can well be imagined.

These official tours are symbolic of the British rule itself. The caravan passes on, spectacular, imperious, unmoved, across a land impoverished and long suffering, the innate culture and hospitality of whose people make them wear a smile even while their stomachs are empty and their hearts near breaking. When evils grow past endurance, they present to the lordly Government a petition of grievances, or a Memorandum of protest. As late as in 1900, a year after the arrival of Curzon as Viceroy, the Congress meeting at Lahore sent a deputation to wait on him, consisting of Sir Pherozshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee, Munshi Madhao Lal. R. N. Mudholkar and a few others. They presented him a memorial in which, among other things, they said:

"The increasing poverty of the peasantry in the greater part of the country, and their consequent inability to maintain themselves without State, and private benevolence is another pressing problem. Your memorialists are fully aware of the fact that the serious attention of the Government has been engaged on it, and they trust that some efficacious remedy will soon be found which may greatly contribute to mitigate that severe poverty and enable the peasantry to better resist the strain which years of bad harvests or scarcity may entail on them."

Memorials, petitions protests—thick as autumnal leaves they were showered upon the ruling power. But the age of petitions had almost come to an end. In 1899 there came to the viceregal office one who had a closed mind to all views other than his own.

Curzon at the comparatively young of 48 years was a man of tireless energy, ruthless efficiency and unchanging opinions. The day he landed in Bombay, the Congress was meeting at Madras, and the President, rather pathetically, welcomed his arrival and expressed the hope that "when he left the country he might carry with him some of the love which followed Gladstone on his leaving this world"—a hope that was foredoomed to defeat. How completely Curzon was ill-suited to his office is proved by his gross misjudgment of the Congress. Writing to the Secretary of State on 18th November 1900, the Oracle said:

"My own belief is that the Congress is tottering to its fall, and one of my great ambitions while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise."

With such ambitions it is not surprising that his regime proved to be a memorable failure, and it was the Congress that lived to see his demise, and the demise of many of his cherished creations.

Already a new note had begun to be heard in the country—the strident, impatient, challenging voice of a nation grown restive under years of bureaucratic rule.





### CHAPTER III

#### THE GROWING TENSION

The six long years of Curzon's rule may be said to have materially changed the course of the freedom movement. He was indirectly responsible for giving to it a fighting quality, a manly spirit of defiance. During his time the mood of "mendicancy" gave place to resolute resistance. The growing tension in the country in these years gave birth to a new phase of political activity. A series of calculated acts of high-handed despotism, resulting from Curzon's headstrong policy, led inevitably to the rise of a militant nationalism which, for a time, split the Congress. By the end of Curzon's term a new cult had arisen, the cult of the bomb, which brought in its wake untold suffering. The second phase of the Congress had begun.

Someone has described the period of Lord Curzon as the end of an era. Indeed, the succession of events brought about by this ostentatious, authoritarian and obstinate grandee, mark the end of the age of Empire-builders. The impressive edifice built by a succession of able and adventurous men was complete. The builders were naturally filled with pride at their handiwork. But they did not realize that the time had come for them to collect their tools, remove the scaffolding and depart. One of the first acts that Curzon accomplished was characteristic of the man. To mark the Coronation of King Edward VII he planned a magnificent Durbar at Delhi. With his meticulous attention to detail, he attended to every little part of this gorgeous tamasha, determined to impress the oriental mind with a display of pageantry such as they never could have seen. It mattered little to him that only the previous year many parts of the country had been devastated by a terrible famine. Men, women and children were dying; but what does it matter? "Is it nothing" asked Curzon, "that the Sovereign at his Coronation should exchange pledges with his assembled lieges, of protection and respect on the one side, of spontaneous allegiance on the other?"

There was widespread protest in the country when news of the projected Durbar reached the people. But it made no difference to the rulers. It is difficult to estimate the actual cost of this extravagant pomp, because by the familiar financial jugglery the expenses were distributed under a variety of unimaginable heads so that a total reckoning of the cost was made almost impossible.

But this much is clear that if even half of the immense amount spent on the Durbar had been utilised for famine relief, tens of thousands of men, women and children could have been saved from death.

The Madras session of the Congress meeting in 1903 condemned this extravagance in strong terms. Lal Mohan Ghose, the President, referred to the humiliating treatment given to the Indian invitees. The European guests were royally looked after. A special train was run from Calcutta to Delhi for their benefit, and a special small railway was laid just for the occasion to take the European guests to their camps. The wife of an English officer describes how "our tents were most luxurious. We have a bed room, sitting room and office room, all furnished very completely and lighted with electric lights—and a charcoal stove to keep us warm at night". In contrast to this, the Indian invitees were lodged in dusty huts, far away from the city, and were left very much to their own resources.

Speaking of the utter callousness of it, Lal Mohan Ghose said :

"Do you think that any administration in England, or France, or the United States would have ventured to waste vast sums of money on an empty pageant, when famine and pestilence were stalking over the land, and the Angel of Death was flapping his wings almost within hearing of the light-hearted revellers? Gentlemen, a year has now rolled by since the great political pageant was held at Delhi against the almost unanimous protests of all our public and representative men both in the press and on the platform. On what ground did they protest? They protested, not because they were wanting in loyalty to the Sovereign, whose coronation it was intended to celebrate, but because they felt that if His Majesty's Ministers had done their duty, and had laid before him an unvarnished story of his famine-stricken subjects in India. His Majesty, with his characteristic sympathy for suffering humanity, would himself have been the first to forbid his representatives in this country to offer a pompous pageant to a starving population. However, our protests were disregarded, and the great tamasha was celebrated, with that utter recklessness of expense which you may always expect when men, no matter how highly placed, were dealing with other people's money, and were practically accountable to no one for their acts."

The splendid pageant passed by, with its elephants caparisoned in gold and silver, its brilliant uniforms and prancing horses, the cloth of gold, silver bells, and above all the "silver howdah in which

sat His Excellency Lord Curzon and his lovely lady". And curiously enough, the British officer's wife says, "But there was hardly any noise and no cheering to speak of". India watched this vain-glorious pomp in silence—a silence that was eloquent. The millions of Indians outside this bedecked crowd were too busy digging up roots and grass to feed their starving children to take any note of the vulgar display which had been got up at their cost for the glorification of Curzon.

The Durbar brought out clearly how completely alien the Government was to the thoughts and feelings of the people. The two lived in two different worlds. Everyone of Curzon's major actions indicated this sad divorce between the ruler and the ruled. The year after he took office he called a Conference at Simla, in 1900, "to consider the system of education in India". Every member of this conference was a British official except one, Dr. Miller, who was a British non-official. According to Curzon's diagnosis the trouble with India was that it was having unrestricted education. The unofficial element in the educational system should be put down. With this pre-conception, he appointed the University Commission whose Report, from which the only Indian member of the Commission violently dissented, created a countrywide protest, and "convulsed educated India from one end of the country to another". On the basis of this report the Universities Bill was framed making Government control of Higher Education supreme, and raising the cost of education so high that, as Dr. Hari Singh Gour said, "Curzon had put golden locks to the doors of the Universities which would open only to golden keys". At the 1903 session of the Congress, Surendranath Banerjee ridiculed the Bill, saying :

"Lord Curzon's name would go down to posterity indissolubly linked with a reactionary and retrograde measure which had been condemned by the unanimous opinion of educated India. We were told that a body of educational experts met in 1900 and advised changes. They met in secret, deliberated in secret, resolved in secret and, I presume, dispersed in secret."

The provisions for the control of Universities under this legislation were so far-reaching that a later Commission—the Sadler Commission—said in 1917 that the Indian Universities were amongst the most completely governmental in the world. It appeared that Government were keen on reducing the entrants into the legal profession, and, therefore, wanted that the law-classes in



non-Government colleges should be abolished. The lawyers constituted then the majority of India's political leadership, and hence the keenness to reduce their number. The Commission said :

"To do away with the law-classes will in many cases increase the expense of the law students' education ; but the central school will have scholarships ; and even if the net result should be to diminish the number of lawyers in India, we are not certain that this would be an unmixed evil."

The Universities Bill, in spite of the countrywide opposition, was passed in 1904, but may be considered to have been still-born. A reform such as this could not possibly be effective in an atmosphere of unanimous disapproval among students, teachers and the general public. Therefore, the condition of colleges and of higher education in the country remained in 1917 practically what it had been before the 1904 Act came to be passed. This was then, another of Curzon's conspicuous failures.

One particular measure taken in Curzon's time is of special interest to Madhya Pradesh. As referred to, in passing, in an earlier chapter, it was during his regime that Berar was permanently ceded to the British by the Nizam. It was announced from Fort William that Berar had been administered by British under the treaties of 1853 and 1860 for meeting the expenses of the Hyderabad contingent, and any balance of revenue was to be handed over to the Nizam ; but that this arrangement had not worked satisfactorily. Therefore these were being redrafted and that henceforth, while recognising the suzerainty of the Nizam, Nawab Mir Sir Mahbub Ali Khan Bahadur, he had ceded Berar permanently to the British, who would pay him 25 lakhs of rupees every year, and that the British would have full rights of Government over Berar, and make such arrangements regarding the contingent as may be considered desirable. This agreement was signed on the 5th of November, 1902, by Lieut.-Col. Sir David Barr on behalf of the British Government, and by Maharaja Sir Kishen Prasad on behalf of the Nizam. Lord Curzon further proposed the addition of Berar to the Central Provinces, and this was proclaimed on 17th September 1903. Thus the Central Provinces and Berar came into existence. In Residency Order, dated the 30th September 1903, and under notification by the Government of India, dated the 11th September 1903, it was published that the administration of Berar had been made over to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, and that under orders of the India Council, the Governor-General directed that all the power of the Resident of Hyderabad would be exercised by the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, and

wherever in any Law the name of the Resident appears, the name of the Chief Commissioner will be substituted. There was some agitation, prominently by Muhammadans and a few Jagirdars, against joining Berar to the Central Provinces, and a meeting was held in Amravati on the 21st February 1903 in which the decision of the Government of India was opposed. A committee was also appointed which sent a representation to the Government of India.

An odious legislation associated with Curzon's regime was the Official Secrets Bill which was condemned in the Imperial Council by Gokhale as a measure, of which it is impossible to speak with patience or moderation. "Lord Curzon is astonished that this should be described as Russianising the administration. I am astonished that anyone should be so imperfectly informed regarding the Russian Government as to think that it has got anything in its purely civil laws so arbitrary and so disastrous to the civil liberties of the people as Lord Curzon's Bill, if passed, would be in this country." Analysing the clauses of the Bill with merciless thoroughness, Gokhale justified his description of the measure as monstrous and iniquitous in the extreme, and calculated to shake the nation's confidence in the justice and fairness of Government.

Thus by one act after another, Curzon added to the tension and resentment in the country. In a famous passage Gokhale compares Curzon's administration with that of Aurangzeb. "There we find the same attempt at a rule excessively centralised and intensely personal, the same strenuous purpose, the same overpowering consciousness of duty, the same marvellous capacity for work, the same sense of loneliness, the same persistence in a policy of distrust and repression, resulting in bitter exasperation all round". He might have added that as Aurangzeb's oppressions made the fall of the Mughal Empire inevitable, so also the despotism of Curzon was the prelude to the collapse of the British Empire. Curzon did not care to understand the people of India. In Gokhale's words "he had no sympathy with popular aspirations, and when he finds them in a subject people, he thinks he is rendering their country a service by putting them down".

The most disastrous of his administrative blunders was the Partition of Bengal. There is a well-known Minute of Curzon on the file on this subject, which might lead us to think that he was aware of the blunder. He wrote:

"Round and round like the diurnal revolutions of the earth went the file, stately, solemn, sure and slow ; and now, in due season, it has completed its orbit and I am invited to register the concluding stage. How can I bring home to those who are responsible the gravity of the blunder?"

But according to him the blunder was not in the proposal to partition Bengal, but in the failure of his office to consult him; and "put up" the file earlier. His Excellency Lord Curzon was never consulted enough. He should have been told sooner about every proposal. There is an amusing description of his desire to go through files: "In long scarlet gowns trimmed with gold lace, the orderlies at the Viceregal Lodge walked every evening in procession to Viceroy's study, bringing His Lordship's evening task. There might be a hundredweight of papers a night; sometimes there would be more. A cubic foot or so of previous references, weighing fifteen or twenty pounds, would come with quite a simple proposal. And to a new-comer, they were papers among which it was easy to lose one's way. "I have perused these papers", wrote Lord Curzon, "but everyone knows the story"—for two hours and twenty minutes. On the whole, I agree with the gentleman whose signature resembles a trombone." (Philip Woodruff: *The Guardians*, p. 196).

But in spite of the blunder of his officers in not consulting him earlier, he adopted the policy advocated by them, and proceeded to partition Bengal. He could not have chosen a more unpropitious time for it. The year was 1904. A tiny Asiatic power, Japan, had in that year vanquished the mighty Russia at the Battle of Tushima—Russia, concerning whom England herself had an obvious dread, as revealed by her policy on India's North-West Frontier. Earlier, the Abyssinians had been able to repulse successfully the armies of Italy. It was clear the dominance of the West could no longer be unquestioned.

The temper in India, too, was anything but subservient. The mounting tension had created in the minds of the people an attitude of defiance. In 1903, Tilak, who had been sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in what was known as the Tai Maharaj Case, had been acquitted on appeal by the High Court. A public meeting held at Amravati congratulated him on his acquittal. The 1904 session of the Congress held at Bombay gave expression to the prevailing mood of the country. "There had grown up a feeling of deep resentment as a result of the series of repressive measures, both legislative and administrative, forced on the country in the teeth of the fiercest opposition. Long before the Congress met it had come to be generally recognised that whatever may be said in favour of Lord Curzon's administration, the educated classes of the country, at any rate, had in him no friend, and that aspirations would receive at his hands not merely cold neglect, but actual repression."

In 1904, a meeting was held at the residence of Tilak, attended by Dada Saheb Khaparde, Dr. Munje and Nilkanthrao Udhoji, among others, and it was decided that they would support Tilak in a fight against Government, if occasion arose. The leaders of the Central Provinces decided to popularise their stand through public lectures and the Press. They utilised the medium of the growing number of newspapers for this purpose, among which *Harikishore* of Yeotmal, started in 1904, was conspicuous for its progressive views. Other papers such as *Subodh Sindhu* of Khandwa, *Arya Sewak* of Narsinghpur, *Jabalpur Times* and *Shubh Chintak* of Jabalpur were comparatively moderate in their views. Extremist papers from outside the State, such as *Kesari*, and *Mahratha* of Poona and *Amrit Bazar Patrika* and *Hindi Bangwasi* of Calcutta had, however, a large circulation in the State. People's minds were in ferment: their mood was sullen, suspicious and resentful.

It was against this background that the Partition of Bengal was ushered in. Curzon was deaf to all protests. Five hundred public meetings held throughout Bengal had proclaimed their opposition to the dismemberment of the province. Memorials poured in upon the Viceroy asking him to stay his hand. A monster petition, signed by 60,000 persons, was sent to the British Parliament. All these were unheeded. The *Government Gazette* of 20th July 1905 announced the division of Bengal as "a settled fact".

What was the real object of this most objectionable act, conceived in secret and brought forth so monstrously? It had long ceased to be a mere administrative arrangement; it had become a political trick. From the outset Curzon had made up his mind to curb and restrain the growth of political activity in the country. In his very first Budget Speech in 1900, he had mentioned that there were twelve important questions, "all of them waiting to be taken up, all of them questions which ought to have been taken up long ago, and to which, as soon as I have the time I propose to devote myself". The purpose of most, if not of all those twelve, measures was to break the growing spirit of freedom in the country. The educated Hindu, especially the lawyers, were the leaders of this movement, and therefore, the Universities Bill was devised to curb them. The Official Secrets Bill had the object of placing in the hands of Government a law to suppress any agitation. The object of the partition of Bengal was to break the solidarity of the people of Bengal, to divide the Hindus and the Muslims, and to create a predominantly Muslim province of East Bengal and Assam

which could be pitted against the truncated Hindu Bengal in an increasing spirit of rivalry and opposition. It was the familiar policy, again, of 'divide and rule'. Sir Bamfylde Fuller who was appointed the first Lieutenant-Governor of the new province of East Bengal and Assam, said provocatively that he had two wives, one Muslim and the other Hindu, and the favourite was the Muslim. It is this far-reaching political implication that made this issue not a provincial matter, but a furious question of all-India agitation. The outcry against it stirred the whole country, but Curzon was not the man to heed public opinion. He described the public outburst as "engineered by a few agitators", and decided that the question had now become a matter of "prestige" with Government. He declared that even if this should be his last act in India, it should be carried out. Indeed, it was his last act: the Partition was gazetted on 20th July, it was carried into effect on 16th October, and Curzon sailed from India on November 18th, 1905. Little realising it, he had done during those six years of hectic activity, everything he could to strengthen and energise the freedom movement in the country. He had lit a raging fire which his successors could not put down.

Out of the anti-Partition agitation was born the cult of Swadeshi and Boycott. A fortnight after the Partition was announced in the Gazette, a mammoth demonstration was held in Calcutta Town Hall on August 7, 1905. It was not enough to pass resolutions of protest: Government had already proved itself impervious to protests. It was necessary to give to the intense feeling of disgust, an outlet of action. Surendranath Banerjee describes in his book *A Nation in the Making* how the idea of boycotting British goods came to their minds. The Chinese were at that time conducting a successful campaign of boycott of American goods, as a mark of their indignation against the exclusion of Chinese immigrants into the United States. They felt that this was something India could copy, to demonstrate their protest against the British. The meeting of August 7 adopted the resolution:

"That this meeting fully sympathises with the resolution adopted at many meetings held in the mofussil to abstain from the purchase of British manufactures so long as the Partition Resolution is not withdrawn, as a protest against the indifference of the British public in regard to Indian affairs and the consequent disregard of Indian public opinion by the present Government."

From this moment the cult of Swadeshi took an aggressive form, and spread like a raging fire throughout the country. In a latter chapter we shall study its origins and growth in some detail.

Here it is enough to point out that this form of boycott adopted at this meeting was meant to be a temporary measure for a specific object. That it had a far-reaching application later is another matter.

No wonder the 1905 session of the Congress met at Benares in a grim and indignant mood. The whole country had been surcharged with discontent. A tense atmosphere prevailed when the session opened with the singing "Vande Mataram"—the first time that a session opened with this anthem. Gokhale presided over this session and naturally referred to the decision to boycott British manufactured goods. He recounted the sorry tale of Curzon's reactionary regime, and said that in the situation that faced the country boycott was justified, as no other remedy was left to us. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya moved the resolution on Boycott, Lala Lajpatrai seconding it, and gave the decisive call "no longer to be content to be beggars, whining for favours; for if they really cared for their country they would have to strike a blow for freedom themselves". Among the fiery speeches made against the injustices done to India were those of Lala Lajpatrai and Dadasaheb Khaparde. A public meeting was held in the Vishweshwar Theatre in Benares at which Tilak, Khaparde, Dr. Munje and Lala Lajpatrai spoke. It was clear even at this session that a clearly marked group was emerging in the Congress which was more vehement and outspoken in its criticism, and was impatient of the moderation that characterised the elders in the party. This division was becoming apparent in this State also with Dadasaheb Khaparde and Dr. Munje representing the extremist group of Tilak, while Shri R. N. Mudholkar and Sir Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis representing the moderate school. The *Desh Sewak* of Nagpur actively supported the former group.

The end of Curzon's term marked the beginning of India's aggressive political awakening. It marks a big step forward in the Freedom Movement. Significantly, it was in the Presidential Address of the Grand Old Man, Dadabhai Naoroji at the Calcutta Congress in 1906 that *Swaraj* was for the first time declared as their definite goal. Meanwhile important changes had occurred in the British Government in England. The Conservative Government of Balfour had appointed Lord Minto to succeed Curzon, but within a few months the Conservatives lost power, and a strong Liberal Government took office in February 1906 with Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister, and to the office of Secretary of State for India came John (later Lord) Morley, the well-known Radical writer and philosopher, the disciple of Mill and the friend and biographer of Gladstone. The elders of the Congress like Gokhale entertained

a lively hope that with a Liberal Government in England and with Morley in the India Office, India could still look forward to a renewal of Indo-British relations on the basis of sympathetic understanding. The Congress once again deputed Gokhale to go to England and endeavour to reverse the Partition of Bengal. But his long and patient efforts in this behalf proved futile. The academic liberalism of Morley disappeared at the first contact with office. Besides, he was now an older—and not necessarily a wiser man. He told Gokhale bluntly that the Partition was “a settled fact, which could no longer be unsettled,” and, as for Colonial Self-Government, he added profoundly, “The fur coat of Canada’s Constitution would never suit the actual conditions of the historical, cultural and psychological climate of India”. The complete transformation of the Liberal-Philosopher was as sad as it was shocking. As some one said, the Tory Viceroy was often more progressive than the Radical Secretary of State.

Thus, when the Congress met at Calcutta in the last week of December 1906, the country and the party were heading for a crisis. It was no longer possible to hold on the leash the impatient and indignant elements who saw nothing but bleak disappointment in all the efforts of the Congress. A few days before the session was due to begin, some of these extremist leaders, Tilak, Khaparde and Munje reached Calcutta and addressed a mass meeting at which over 15,000 persons were present. Lala Lajpatrai presided. Another new and fiery star had risen in the Congress firmament is Bipin Chandra Pal, an able publicist and one of the fiercest of the younger group in the Congress. For some years thereafter, ‘Lal. Bal and Pal’ dominated the left wing of the Congress. Public lectures of these leaders had prepared a tense atmosphere when the Congress met on 26th December. This group wanted to make Tilak the President of this session, but when Dadabhai Naoroji’s name was proposed by some of the elder leaders, Tilak withdrew his name. There was considerable heat in all the discussions, as was only natural against the background of the recent wrongs suffered by Bengal. After a highly emotional debate the important resolutions on Swaraj, Boycot, Swadeshi and National Education were passed. The Congress had accepted the challenge of the Bengal Government which had charged with sedition persons who issued Swadeshi circulars, and had by a thoughtless Ordinance banned the cry of ‘Vande Mataram’. The climax came when the Congress delegates attending a Provincial Conference at Barisal were assaulted by the police, and leaders such as Surendranath Banerjee and Motilal Ghose were arrested. Numbers of small school children were prosecuted for shouting ‘Vande Mataram’

and military and punitive police were quartered on disturbed areas. It is not surprising that the speakers at the Congress session were not inclined to be subdued or temperate in their speeches. When the Calcutta session ended another partition had begun to raise its head,—a division of the Indian National Congress. On one side were the senior men who were opposed to any radical step, who still hoped to persuade the Parliament and the British Government to do the right thing by India, while on the other side were the younger men, frankly antagonistic to all co-operation with the British Government. And beyond these two groups, in the distance, loomed the apostles of violence, the believers in the bomb and the revolver for whom victory meant a baptism of blood.

The terrorist movement began to assume serious proportions with the beginning of 1907, but for a time it did not find a congenial soil outside Bengal and Punjab and to some extent in Maharashtra. A group called Rashtriya Mandal was formed in Nagpur which was, in fact, an extremist organisation consisting of many Congressmen. Nilkanthrao Udhoji was the President and among its members were Dr. Munje, Achyutrao Kolhatkar, Dr. Paranjpe, Madhaorao Sapre, Ramnarayan Rathi, Barrister Chakravarti, Dr. Gadre and several others. They utilised Shivaji and Ganesh celebrations for propagating the idea of National Education and Swadeshi. Achyutrao Kolhatkar took over the paper *Desh Sewak*, and in his hands it became a powerful medium for popularising the extremist view. At the same time, to serve the Hindi-speaking areas, funds were raised, and the Nagri Press of Bombay was purchased by Madhaorao Sapre, and on 17th April 1907 the *Hindi Kesari* started publication. After a few months Jagannath Prasad Shukla, editor of the *Venkateshwar Samachar* of Bombay became the editor of *Hindi Kesari*, and the press was entrusted to Laxmidhar Bajpai. From the very beginning this paper became the spearhead of the nationalist views and before the end of 1907 it had a circulation of more than 6,000 copies.

At the Calcutta session the invitation for holding the next session at Nagpur had been extended by Shri Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis. During the months of 1907 the extremist group was marshalling its forces in preparation for this session. Dadasaheb Khaparde and Dr. Munje toured the province. They visited Wardha in May, and from there proceeded to Chhindwara. On the 12th they went to Seoni, and it was while they were here that they heard of the arrest of Lala Lajpatrai. From Seoni they went to Jabalpur, Katni and Sagar. At all these places they addressed largely attended public meetings and established branches of the Nationalist wing of the Congress. They then visited Hoshangabad,



Harda and Khandwa. At Khandwa, it was with difficulty that they could find a place for holding a meeting, but it is a matter of interest that here the Muslim population gave full support to the visitors. They then went to Burhanpur and thence back to Amravati.

Government's repressive measures were in full swing during this time and among its early victims was the paper *Harikishore* of Yeotmal. The editors of this paper had invited Tilak from Amravati to Yeotmal and presented him an address. It is interesting to note that the title of "Lokmanya" was used for the first time on this occasion. The *Harikishore* had published three articles on the arrest of Lajpatrai, and it was on the ground of these articles that the paper was prosecuted. On 12th November Shri Prithwiger Harigir, the owner of the paper, was sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of a thousand rupees.

As dates of the Congress Session approached, the local Reception Committee formed at Nagpur intensified its efforts to gather support for the candidature of Tilak for the presidentship. The breach between the two wings of the Congress widened in this process, and the meeting of the Reception Committee convened on 22nd September 1907 at the Town Hall in Nagpur could not be held owing to intense party feeling. It was with difficulty that the moderates, like Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis, Sir M. B. Dadabhai could get out of the Town Hall. For the first time the student population in the city began to play an important part in political demonstrations. Groups of them went about in procession with photographs of Tilak, Lajpat Rai, Arobindo Ghosh and Bepin Chandra Pal, and singing 'Vande Mataram'. When an Inspector of Schools entered a class he was greeted with shouts of 'Vande Mataram'. Similar greetings met some European Professors of the Morris College (now Nagpur Mahavidyalaya) when they entered their classes, as a result of which about thirty students were arrested. Chief Commissioner Sir Reginald Craddock was furious, and he wrote to the Inspector-General of Police on October 22nd, 1907 :

"I am not satisfied with the manner in which the police are dealing with the student rowdiness in Nagpur. If things go on as they are going on, all our respectable public men will be frightened away from Nagpur. For the future I am determined that rowdiness will be put down. I have asked the Commissioner to convene a meeting of Principals and Headmasters to discuss the question of enforcing discipline but the police must catch the rowdy students before we can deal with them properly. Nagpur is being disgraced in the public press

by continued incidents of this kind and they must cease. It is time that Nagpur ceased to be a bear garden of students moved by sedition agitators."

The Inspector-General of Police, Mr. C. R. Cleveland, in his turn, wrote to the District Superintendent of Police, Nagpur, a lengthy memorandum, which may be quoted in full, as it reveals the temper of the time. The memorandum is dated 24th October 1907:

"It has come to my notice that students and others in Nagpur have of late adopted an insulting and riotous behaviour towards some respectable people on the ground that the latter have taken up a line in connection with Congress or political matters which the students and their advisers do not approve.

The maxim to be observed by the Police in all such cases is that neither sedition nor politics are an excuse for breaking the common law.

Section 34 of the Police Act appears to me to give the Police all necessary powers to deal with misconduct in towns where the section applies. Under that section (see clause 6) the Police may arrest without warrant any person found riotous on any road or in any open place or street or thoroughfare to the inconvenience or annoyance of the residents or passengers and such person, on conviction before a Magistrate, is liable to a fine not exceeding Rs. 50, or to imprisonment not exceeding eight days. The word "riotous" has, in this section, no hard and fast limitations depending on the definition of "riot" in the Indian Penal Code. It is an English word with a plain English meaning to be looked for in English dictionaries rather than in Indian law books. Students or others who insult or annoy residents and passengers by shouting at them 'Bande Mataram' or other provocative or insulting words, or by throwing dirt at them or by threatening gestures are, in my opinion, behaving in a 'riotous' manner and should be dealt with by prompt arrest and prosecution. Under section 31 of the Police Act it is the duty of the Police to keep order on the public roads and in the public streets, etc., and this means it is their duty to prevent disorder.

The time has come for the Nagpur Police to keep order strictly and I request that you will keep them to their responsibilities and powers in this matter.

If the powers of the Police under the Police Act and under other portions of the Penal Law seem to you in any way deficient to prevent any particular kind of disorder, you should at once refer to me for further instructions.

Members of the public who are insulted or annoyed by threats, assaults, abuse or hostile demonstrations should be encouraged to complain to the Police and their complaints should be sympathetically dealt with.

Demonstrations from house-windows against street passengers should be dealt with by the Police as offences committed in the streets themselves.

Some of your Reserve Police, Special and ordinary, and policemen in plain clothes should be employed under selected officers to watch houses and streets where disorder is suspected and to deal with riotous persons promptly and efficiently.

To begin with, the whole population of Nagpur must be taught to be afraid of being disorderly under the eye of the Police, which is always on them, whether the Police uniform is to be seen or not."

It is not necessary in this narrative to go into the details of the unfortunate incidents of the Surat Congress of 1907. The venue was shifted to Surat by the All-India Congress Committee, partly because of the tense feeling prevailing in Nagpur. But that did not prevent the breach—perhaps, it precipitated it. Months of piled-up excitement, frayed tempers, the emotions of the moment and some degree of mass hysteria—all these combined to produce the stormy scene on the opening day of the Congress. Mr. Rutherford, a Member of the British Parliament, who had been invited to attend the session made some derogatory remarks about what he called the rowdyism at the meeting, to which Lokmanya Tilak replied reminding him that several such scenes had taken place in the British Parliament and on that occasion an angry opposition member had walked away with the mace of the Speaker. Tilak added that it was to the credit of the Congress that this was the first time in twenty-four years that a thing like this had happened.

The Surat Session marked the beginning of a new phase in the freedom movement. A new spirit was abroad, which was filling the minds and hearts not of a select few in the educated middle class, but of the vast masses of the people. The movement was beginning to assume the proportions of a people's movement

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## CHAPTER IV

### CUDGELS AND CRUMBS

On all the hesitating and spasmodic attempts made by the British Government to grant political reforms to India may be inscribed the tragic verdict, "Too late and too little". As early as in 1906 soon after the Liberal Ministry of Campbell-Bannerman took office, the idea of introducing some constitutional reforms in India had begun to dawn on White Hall. Lord Morley wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Minto:

"Why should you not now consider as practical and immediate things, the extension of the native element in your Legislative Council; ditto in the local councils; full time for discussing Budget in your Legislative Council instead of four or five skimpy hours; right of moving amendments (of course, officials would remain a majority)? If I read your letters correctly, you have no disposition whatever to look on such changes as these in a hostile spirit—quite the contrary." (Morley: *Recollections*, Vol. II.)

But the process of translating these proposals into a parliamentary measure took a long time. Between the first impulse and the final legislation, nearly three years elapsed: years of growing racial bitterness and persecution in India. The result was that what might have been received with some satisfaction in 1906 caused only sullen disillusionment in 1909. When Parliament passed the Minto-Morley Reforms in February 1909, the entire political background in India had changed; an unbridgeable estrangement divided the people and the Government. As we shall see later, a similar kind of deterioration took place again between the years 1916 and 1919, which doomed the prospects of the Mantagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

Agitation—Repression—Violence: that was the unhappy chain of events which marked the years after 1907. Curzon having sown the wind, his successor had to reap the whirl-wind. A series of calculated acts of injustice culminating in the Partition of Bengal; acts of oppression and insult, and a deliberate indifference to popular feeling created a situation which exploded into violent reaction. We have seen how even a constitutional body like the Congress was split into two groups. But more ominous was the growth of secret societies in many parts of the country, particularly in Bengal, which believed in the efficacy of the bomb and the revolver as

instruments of political liberation. The sequence of agitation—repression—violence is well exemplified by the first bomb outrage that took place on the last day of March 1908. The *swadeshi* agitation in Calcutta was met by brutal repression by the Government. Young students, members of highly respectable families, were flogged in public as a punishment for taking part in the *Swadeshi* movement. The worst sinner was the Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, Mr. Kingsford, who passed inhuman punishment on persons whose offence was merely the shouting of some slogans. The injury sank deep into the people's hearts and found its outlet in violence. Two young persons, Khudiram Bose and Profulla Chakie, decided to avenge the injury, and proceeded to Muzaffarpur where Mr. Kingsford had been transferred as District Judge. Unfortunately, the bomb hit the wrong carriage and two innocent ladies, Mrs. Kennedy and her sixteen-year-old daughter, were killed. This was all the more unfortunate because Mr. Pringle Kennedy, the husband of the lady, was one of the few Europeans keenly interested in the Congress and, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, had taken an active part in some sessions of the Congress.

The Muzaffarpur tragedy was the signal for letting loose a reign of terror. Bureaucracy was in alarm. Not content with existing laws whose armoury contained all the weapons that any Government may need in times of repression, new laws were devised to inflict summary punishment on any who may be suspected to be against the British. The Explosives Act and the Seditious Meetings Act were passed, and the Criminal Law was amended drastically for the purpose. The courts were given summary jurisdiction in regard to all cases of seditious violence. The term "sedition" itself was so incapable of precise definition that any one whom the Government wanted could be brought under its scope. Several well-known leaders, who could by no stretch of imagination be considered terrorists, were arrested. There was another old weapon in the armoury of British Government which had been lying unused for many decades. It now came handy and was used against the Indian leaders. Regulation III of 1818 gave Government the power to deport without trial any one who might be obnoxious to them. Under this provision not only Indians but also some inconvenient Englishmen were detained and deported. It was under this Regulation that Lala Lajpatrai and Ajit Singh were arrested and deported from Punjab.

The extremist wing of the Congress was steadily gaining strength in Nagpur ever since the breach occurred at Surat. Aravind Ghosh had stopped at Nagpur for a day on his way to Surat on

22nd December 1907, and delivered a speech at the Raghubir Theatre. He made a longer halt in the city in January 1908 and addressed a few public meetings expounding the policy of the extremist Congressmen. He urged the need to adopt *Swadeshi* as a living principle and decried the destruction of Indian trade and commerce owing to the exploitation by British manufacturers. His lectures were published in full by *Desh Sewak*, as a result of which the editor Shri Achchuytrao Kolhatkar was charged with sedition and sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. The visit of Aravind Ghosh helped to consolidate the position of the Nationalists, as the extremist wing of the Congress was called, in Nagpur. The attempt to hold a session of the extremist wing in 1908 at Nagpur, however, did not succeed, since the Deputy Commissioner had issued an order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code banning the meeting.

How touchy Government was about its prestige is revealed by its ferocious reaction to even minor acts which may be construed as disloyal. During an industrial exhibition held in Nagpur at Kasturchand Park in November 1908, under the patronage of the Chief Commissioner, the Nationalists kept themselves aloof, though the moderates gave it their support. Soon after the inauguration of the exhibition, it was discovered that the statue of Queen Victoria, which stood in the Maharajbagh Garden, had been defaced with coal-tar. This was considered a most heinous offence, and a vigorous police search was ordered. The Superintendent of the adjacent Agriculture College Hostel, Shri Narayanrao Paranjpe along with two overseers and a student were arrested, but though Government took the case to the High Court they could not prove it, and Paranjpe was acquitted. It did not, however, save him from being removed from service. The matter did not end there. Government announced a reward of Rs. 1,000 to any one who gave information leading to the apprehension of the offender. The amount was never claimed. The Inspector-General of Police summoned all the leading Nationalists for interrogation. Sir Reginald Craddock, the Chief Commissioner, says in his memoirs :

"When I had to visit the hostel attached to the Agricultural College in November last while enquiring into the outrage of the Queen's statue, I found the attitude of a number of boys and students extremely offensive and provocative, and it is a noteworthy coincidence that a little later I discovered that the hostel was full of nationalist literature in the purveyance and distribution of which the hostel masters had borne an important part."

Apparently, Government was in a state of panic. It saw potential revolution in every little act. Perhaps, the incidents in Bengal put them in this nervous state. In August 1908, a person who had given information to Government about the bomb-making factory in Maniktolla had been shot dead. In November of the same year the Sub-Inspector of police, who had tried to arrest one of the suspected persons in the Muzaffarpur incident, was killed in the streets of Calcutta. While the case against the accused was going on the Public Prosecutor was assassinated outside the Police Court at Alipore. These incidents filled Government with alarm. They also agitated the British public, who were far more shocked by isolated murders of officers than by the mass murders of the so-called agitators by the police. This panicky frame of mind is revealed in an article written by Sir George Elliot, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in the *Empire Review*. He said that the English should now change their ideas about the softness and weakness of Indians. If Government was not prepared to repress the prevailing conditions firmly now, much more serious steps would have to be taken later. The Press should be strictly controlled, and the Congress should be plainly told that they should cut off all relations with the breakers of law and order. The *Daily Mail* of London published fantastic stories that secret committees had been formed in India to kill Lord Kitchner and Lord Minto, and that Poona was the headquarters of these societies, that they were financed by money collected from Zamindars and some native rulers. Thus, the Britishers were roused to a state of hysteria, and the most unbalanced section shouted for the blood of the agitators.

In Madhya Pradesh, the persecution of those who were in any way connected with the Nationalist movement reached its high-water mark during Craddock's regime. For instance, a most extraordinary notification appeared in the issue of the Gazette of the Central Provinces, dated the 22nd August 1908. It was signed by F. S. S. Slowcock, Chief Secretary to Government of Central Provinces and was to the following effect:

"For the information of all whom it may concern, it is notified that whereas Shivraj Singh, a pensioned Tahsildar now a resident of Rampaili in the Bhandara district, has, in spite of the warning given him, participated in political agitation directed against the Government of a kind inconsistent with loyalty and good behaviour, subject to which all such pensions are granted by Government, the Chief Commissioner hereby directs that with effect from the date of this order, the pension hitherto enjoyed by the said pensioner, Shivraj Singh, is forfeited and that a copy of this order shall be communicated to

the Comptroller of the Central Provinces for cancellation of Pension Payment Order hitherto in force in favour of the said Shivraj Singh.”

Regarding the specific character of the “political agitation” in which the ex-Tahsildar was alleged to have taken part, not a word was said, and it is clear that the offence could not have been of a heinous nature, for in that event a prosecution for sedition was ready at hand. As a matter of fact, it appeared that the gravamen of his crime consisted in his taking part in a procession held to express sympathy with Lokmanya Tilak. If this was really the case, it was monstrous that a man who was no longer in the service of Government and whose participation in political agitation could in no way be regarded as detrimental to the interests of discipline, should be arbitrarily deprived of his pension in such a fashion.

A school teacher of Mohgaon, Balaji Narayan, was removed from service because he took part in a political meeting. The punishment of Shri Wamanrao Joshi was more serious. He was then a teacher in the Shivaji Rashtriya School, and was charged with sedition for a speech delivered during the Ganesh Festival at Nagpur. He was asked to furnish a personal bond of Rs. 1,000 and four sureties of Rs. 500 each. Shri Wamanrao Joshi naturally refused to furnish any security, and was, therefore, sentenced to one year's imprisonment. These are some typical examples, but not exhaustive of the instances of tyranny and oppression through which the country passed during the years 1907 to 1910.

Lokmanya Tilak was arrested for his articles on the Maniktolla case, and in July 1908 he was sentenced to deportation for six years. This shocking news reached Nagpur by telephone and the reaction was immediate. There was complete hartal in the city. Students precipitately left their classes and went out in procession. In their fury they pelted stones at the Principal of Morris College, Mr. Jones, while he was travelling in a tonga, and it was with difficulty that he could reach home under police guard. A mammoth crowd gathered at Chitnis Park for a public meeting but they were violently dispersed by the Army and the meeting was banned. A few days later, on 19th August 1908, the meeting was held in front of the Venkatesh Theatre, and a resolution was passed demanding the immediate release of Lokmanya Tilak. Another resolution was also passed saying “that when leaders of the public were unjustly forced into jails, in order to meet the challenge and to draw the attention of the British to the state of things, this meeting calls upon Indians to completely boycott British goods”. Similar meetings were held in almost all the important towns in



this State, while the *Hindi Kesari* came out with a long and poignant article entitled "Will you not allow us even to cry?". Solemn vows were taken at all public meetings to intensify the use of Swadeshi goods and boycott all British articles. The agitation was so wide-spread that Sir Frank Sly, the Commissioner of Berar, called a meeting of all the leading citizens of Yeotmal and threatened them that if they did not stop the agitation at once, Government would take most severe measures, and post punitive police in all places which showed a tendency to be unruly.

As a counterpart to this threat, Sir Reginald Craddock went to the Anjuman High School at Nagpur and complimented the management for keeping their students away from the agitation. He was trying to adopt in this State the policy which Minto was following in the all-India sphere, of encouraging the Muslims in all possible ways to keep away from the general body of public opinion. In a latter chapter this policy of promoting communal friction is examined in some detail. We have already seen how it was embodied in the partition of Bengal, creating the new province of East Bengal and Assam which was to be a 'Moslem' province. When Lord Minto began to formulate a scheme for political reforms in India, he manœuvred the setting up of a Muslim deputation which met him in 1906. He readily conceded their demand for a separate communal electorate. The consequences of this unhappy act have since then been too painfully familiar, and have been pointed out at another place. In the same year, in 1906, the All-India Moslem League was formed which was to serve as antidote to the Congress. It was consistently loyalist until 1911 when a strong leftist group rose within its rank with the Ali Brothers as its leaders. Of this we shall see more later.

Meanwhile, repression was in full fury. The *Hari Kishore* of Yeotmal, the *Hindi Kesari* and *Desh Sewak* were again the objects of persecution. Shri Bhawe, editor of *Hari Kishore*, was sentenced to five years' rigorous imprisonment and his press was forfeited. On 21st August 1908, Shri Madhao Rao Sapre of *Hindi Kesari* was arrested while he was going to his office, his house and office were searched, and he was sent to the Central Jail, though bail was offered and he was under medical treatment. The same day Shri Achchyutrao Kolhatkar was arrested at the Nagpur railway station as he alighted from the Calcutta Mail and was sent to the jail, though Dr. Munje and others offered to stand surety. Owing to the importunities of his friends and relations, and partly due to his illness, Shri Madhaorao Sapre was persuaded to give a written apology for the articles published by him. He was, therefore, released; but the case against Achchyutrao Kolhatkar was proceeded

with, and he was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. Another victim to repression at this time was Ramlal Bajpai whose article, published in *Desh Sewak* about a scandal in the sale of foreign sugar in India, led to his prosecution. It was Babu Purushottamdas Tandon who conducted his defence at the time, and Ramlal Bajpai was acquitted by the High Court.

In the midst of this fury of repression, many parts of the country, including Madhya Pradesh, were afflicted by famine in 1907-08 as a result of inadequate rainfall. The condition of the people was almost as pitiable as during the terrible famine of 1899-1900. A Famine Fund was opened by the Chief Commissioner, and in Nagpur itself daily 19,000 persons were supported by famine relief. There was great distress all over the State with people dying in large numbers. There could be no greater condemnation of the fifty years of Crown administration than that at the end of it people live in such a margin of starvation, that a single season's shortage of rainfall decimated numbers of them. During the earlier famines of the nineteenth century an Englishman living in India at the time wrote some touching lines describing the distress of the people. Addressing the rulers, he says, "You pretend that you are discharging a God-given duty by ruling over the benighted people of India":

*"That the people cannot rule themselves, that you can do it well,  
That you have made fair paradise of what would else be hell,  
Hell for whom? And heaven for whom? Is that your picture  
true?"*

*Was the ryot worse in ages past than he is now with you?  
Is it heaven for that poor bundle there, who is too weak to walk?  
Is it heaven for these vast plains of men too spiritless to talk?  
Is it paradise for womenfolk to watch their children dead,  
and hear no more the plaintive voice that cried in vain for  
bread?"*

*Is it heaven, O Angels God-elect? Is it heaven, or is it hell?*

Fortunately, the famine of 1907-08 proved to be the parting kick of the series that began in the nineties of the previous century. While the country was going through these persecutions and misfortunes, the slow-moving process of constitutional reforms was working itself out in the British Parliament. We have seen how it originated in Lord Morley's letter to the Viceroy in 1906. The scheme was further outlined by Morley while presenting the Indian Budget to the British Parliament in 1907: the whole plan as agreed

to between him and the Viceroy was embodied in a despatch of 1908, and in the next year a Bill was introduced in Parliament incorporating all the changes suggested by the other parties, so that it was passed as an agreed measure. The main principle of the Act was that which King Edward VII had announced in his Proclamation of 28th November 1908. It said, among other things:

“From the first, the principle of representative institutions began to be gradually introduced, and the time has come when . . . that principle may be prudently extended. Important classes among you, representing ideas that have been fostered and encouraged by British rule, claim equality of citizenship, and a greater share in legislation and Government. The politic satisfaction of such a claim will strengthen, not impair, existing authority and power. Administration will be all the more efficient if the officers who conduct it have great opportunities of contact with those whom it affects and with those who influence and reflect common opinion about it.”

Lord Morley had, of course, no intention of introducing any system which may be considered to amount to a parliamentary principle. He made it clear in the House of Lords, “If I were attempting to set up a parliamentary system in India, or if it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily up to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I, for one, would have nothing at all to do with it”. (Morley: *Indian Speeches*.)

While the Bill was being debated there was heated criticism of the State of affairs in India resulting in a number of murders of Englishmen. In the House of Commons Lord Curzon was charged with having been responsible for this situation. Curzon, in reply, vehemently denied it and laid the blame at the doors of the members of Parliament who sympathised with Indians and had been a party to the system of education which had so trained the Indians as to take to extremist path. He went on to explain that he had tried to curb this baneful effect of the system of education by the Universities Act, and if it was wrong why did not Parliament disapprove of it? From this protestation this much, at least, is clear that the purpose of this legislation, as pointed out earlier, was to check the political movement in India. Ultimately, it was the careful piloting by Morley that succeeded in negotiating the Bill through Parliament.

The Reforms of 1909 introduced hardly any material change in the structure of Government. On the executive side, although an Indian member was added to the Viceroy's Executive Council it

made little difference to the solidarity of the European bureaucracy. An indirect process of selection of non-official members to the Provincial and Imperial Legislatures was included, under which municipalities and other local bodies could send representatives. The size of the Legislatures, both at the Centre and in the Provinces was thus enlarged, but they had no real power, nor could they effectively influence the Government. They had only some negative function. "The Government had thus organised for itself a perpetual opposition, with no function except to criticise, no chance of ever taking office, and no real responsibility to the rather vague electorate which they were supposed to represent." (Thompson and Garrett, p. 583.) Even when a representative was sent up by a local body, it was open to Government not to accept him as a member. For instance a man like Shri N. C. Kelkar was disallowed because "his antecedents and reputation render his election contrary to public interest".

There was keen and widespread disappointment in the country when the Reforms Act was passed. Aravind Ghosh gave expression to this feeling in an open letter which was widely circulated in Madhya Pradesh also. He referred to the utter disillusionment caused by the empty reforms, and urged that the only way to secure our freedom was not through sycophancy but by organising the national forces. He regretted the attitude of the moderates and called for a conference of all Nationalists at which the future line of action could be settled. The immediate result of this was that the Bengal Police decided to arrest Aravind Ghosh, but he evaded the warrant and escaped into the French Territory of Pondicherry where he lived the rest of his life.

The Congress Session of 1909 which met at Lahore with Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya as President, gave expression to the people's dissatisfaction with the Reforms. It "placed on record its deep sense of disapproval of the creation of separate electorates", and of the Regulations framed under the Reforms Act. Another resolution expressed dissatisfaction at the fact that the new Province of Central Provinces and Berar was not allowed to have a Legislative Council. For the next two years this demand for a Council in this State was repeatedly made, until Lord Hardinge's Government conceded it in 1912.

When the first meeting of the newly constituted Imperial Legislative Assembly met in 1909, Lord Minto in his inaugural address made it quite clear that the Provincial Councils and the Central Assembly were not intended to transfer any power to Indians. He said that the British Government had permitted Indians to be

members of the Councils merely in order to enable Government to know the point of view of the people. The members were free to express their opinion but Government was at liberty to accept it or not. He made it clear—if it was not painfully clear already—that they had no intention of establishing a democratic form of Government in the country, and added gratuitously that no real power would be entrusted to the members. Thus, India was expected to be satisfied with these miserable crumbs, and if any section of the people was so misguided as to demur, the heavy cudgels were the answer. Many leaders of the people languished in jails. The misery and privations which even the more fortunate of these patriots suffered can be seen from the experiences recorded by Achchyutrao Kolhatkar who, as mentioned earlier, had been sent to prison on a charge of sedition. In 1910, the Calcutta High Court, on appeal, considered the articles published by him innocuous and he was acquitted. The public of Nagpur gave him a reception on release from the jail, but the Judicial Commissioner of Nagpur was still determined to have his revenge. On 26th March he cancelled Shri Kolhatkar's Sanad as a pleader. In answer to some questions that the *Kesari* had asked Kolhatkar about his life in the jail, he has given a statement which makes a painful but revealing narrative:

"The day I went to jail my spectacles were taken away and it was after much beseeching that the Jailor was persuaded to return it to me but on the condition that I will not use them before the Superintendent. When I went to jail my weight was 135 lbs. but during the five months of my trial it had come down to 114 lbs. Perhaps the reason was that the food sent from the house was not made available to me, because the hours when the food came did not synchronize with the uncertain timings of my going to and returning from the court. The convicts were weighed every 15 days, but in spite of diminishing weight I was never asked any reason nor any person took the slightest notice of it. In the very first week of jail life, the weight came to 110 lbs., after which I became ill and the weight must have been reduced to 100 lbs. It would take a long time to narrate all that happened in jail, but so far as my illness is concerned, the Superintendent never believed that I was sick. In the Nagpur Jail there are two octagons, the northern and the southern. First offenders are sent in the northern and confirmed offenders are kept in the southern. But I was confined in the southern one. I was never sent to the hospital and the doctor was ordered to give me medicine in the presence of the Jailor, and though a sick man is provided with a cot, I had to sleep on the ground and a coarse gunny cloth to

spread was given to me, and except for a few days, no other diet except milk was ever given to me. When I first went to jail I was given salted gruel in the morning and at noon four rotis of juwar with dal and some sort of vegetable. On the first day I managed to swallow only three of these hand-made rotis and I also managed the vegetables. But the dal in spite of all efforts never went below the throat. In fact I could not stand the smell of the abominable mess. Let nobody be under the idea that the rotis and dal and bhaji which they eat at their houses is what convicts get in jail. They can't even dream of the quality supplied without personal experience. One day suddenly I was surprised to see that instead of three dishes I was only served with two, and that vegetable cooked in dal was, in the opinion of the authorities, a much more delectable dish. I can only exclaim at the horror of it. Why did they not cook the flour also with the dal and the vegetable is a mystery. It should have appealed to the sense of economy of the jail authorities and saved an immense amount of time, labour and cost involved in separately cooking a couple of hundred juwar panethees.

Repugnant as it was, I had to swallow my share of it. The juwar roti never could appease my hunger, in fact, I could have equally eaten bread made of saw-dust. One can hardly imagine the condition of the convicts of the rural areas whose normal diet even of juwar was of very much larger quantity than given in jails.

In Nagpur Jail there were different occupations given to the convicts. I had hoped vainly, as it turned out, that I would be put in some such work as tailoring, ironsmithy, carpentry, durrimaking, printing, cane work, press, colouring or typing, proof-reading or clerical but nothing but grinding was my lot. Perhaps it gave a malicious satisfaction to my persecutors that by putting me to this back-breaking and hard job, they would break my spirit. But the fire of the love of my country burnt strong and I simply laughed at the hardships which I had invited upon myself. I had to get used to grind 20 seers of juwar within three days of my coming to jail though convicts are usually given six days to get themselves accustomed to this hard labour. It is in this manner that the executive through its authority grinds down the soul of man. I was kept in Nagpur jail for five months and a half, and during this period every form of punishment known to jail regulations was awarded to me. Being considered to be a hardened criminal, they threatened me with caning, but perhaps luck intervened and I was transferred to Khandwa. Meanwhile hand-fetters, leg-fetters, crossbar fetters, all were imposed, but to crown all, as there

were 20 reports made against me, the three days of remission given to other convicts were denied me. We know how hot Nagpur is in summer and in these months I was given rough, bristling gunny clothings to wear. It was in these gunny clothings which I had to keep on night and day, that the flour-grinding was done. Full of perspiration all over and no facilities for bathing, not even a piece of cloth to wipe the perspiration, infested with lice and fleas, the awful stink emanating from all over, life was scarcely pleasant. It was impossible to eat under these conditions but if we did not swallow the prescribed ration, the 20 seers grinding was impossible. Sleep at night was out of the question. There was an occasional interval of a fitful unconsciousness and all this resulted in a slow consuming fever but nobody took any notice of it, not even the doctor. I was transferred to Khandwa where I was put to gitti-breaking. The Superintendent warned me that I had caused the greatest trouble to the authorities of Nagpur jail and the first report against me in Khandwa "though your father was a Sessions Judge and was a famous person", would entail 30 stripes. I was new to this gitti-breaking and so the Superintendent gave me six days to accustom myself to it and during that period I could manage to break the standard requirement of six cubic feet. In Nagpur, I was given three months of bar fetters of which two months had been suffered in Nagpur, the remaining one month was remitted by the Deputy Commissioner of Khandwa during his monthly visit. Similarly, my cross-bar fetters punishment was also remitted. The warders at Khandwa used the foulest language and I wonder if Lokmanya Tilak and Paranjpe in Mandalay would be exposed to the same indignities. Convicts were allowed to sit in the latrine for not more than a minute or two and if he exceeded the limit the warder will pull him out of the seat. One had to eat the entire prescribed diet. Eating less was another offence and you certainly could not "cry for more". It was the rule that no one should be kept in a solitary cell for more than seven days. But in Nagpur I was all along kept in the solitary cell. In Khandwa, however, I was with other prisoners. I learnt later that a milder treatment at Khandwa was due to my friends and questions asked in Parliament and the Chief Commissioner assured my friends that nothing was wrong with me though during the time I was very ill. The change to Khandwa certainly did me good. The Kesari wrote strongly that the punishment of the kind meted to political prisoners like me was most inhuman and unbecoming to Government, this was in 1909.

Almost the first fruit of the new Reforms was the Press Act of 1910 which effectively suppressed every nationalist paper till about

1914. Under this law every proprietor of a press was required, at the time of registration, to deposit a security ranging from 500 to 2,000 rupees at the discretion of the Magistrate. The presses established previous to the Act may, at the discretion of the Provincial Government, be asked to deposit, a security 500 to 5,000 rupees. Similarly the publisher of every newspaper at the time of the registration should deposit 500 to 3,000 rupees, as required by the Provincial Government who were empowered to forfeit the security if they considered any publication in the paper seditious. Thereafter double the security would be demanded, and if a second offence was committed, all the papers, books and the press would be forfeited. It is no wonder that under such an atrocious law the publication of all nationalist papers was effectively stopped.

A brief reference should be made to the growing interest that the country was taking at this time in the condition of Indians overseas. The position was particularly galling in South Africa which provided the scene for the emergence of the Maker of Free India, Mahatma Gandhi. The Indian immigrants in all the colonies—Mauritius, British Guiana, Natal, East Africa and other places—generally came from the lower strata of society, and the bulk of them were manual labourers. But there were also some merchants. The treatment meted out to these people grew from bad to worse, so that by the beginning of the twentieth century it had begun to exercise the minds not only of the Congress and leaders of the people, but even of the Government. Gandhiji had once before visited South Africa in 1893 to lead an agitation against the iniquitous poll tax of £3 which was imposed by the Natal Government on all Indians who remained in the country without indenture. Later, during the Boer War, he was instrumental in making the Indians in South Africa take the British side to prove to the British that the Indians too had a stake in the country. But the British victory brought no change to the Indian settlers. In fact, South Africa under the British proved to be even more unkind than under the old Boer Government. Thus, it was that in 1908 Gandhiji found himself in jail in Transval where he was set to work breaking stones. At a large public meeting held in Caxton Hall in London, Mancharji Bhaonagri said in a quivering voice, "Let the British realise that every stroke on the hard stone will break every link of the iron chain which is binding Indians in South Africa, and every stroke of the hammer will also break the chain that binds India to England." Naturally the resolutions passed at the Bankipur session of the Congress in 1912 reflected the apprehension and anger which India felt at what was happen-



ing in South Africa. The speech at this session of Gokhale who had recently visited South Africa was a powerful and moving indictment of the injustice done to Indians. The British Government in England found itself in a wholly false position when its subjects in one country were maltreated by its Government in another country, and could or would do nothing about it. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, was content with pouring the unction to his soul by expressing "the sympathy of India, deep and burning, and not only of India, but of all lovers of India like myself, for their compatriots in South Africa in their resistance to invidious and unjust laws."

Lord Hardinge succeeded Minto as Viceroy in 1910, the very year in which the new Legislative Councils started functioning. The same year Edward VII died and was succeeded by King George V. In White Hall, Morley gave place to Lord Creme as Secretary of State for India. All these changes brought in their wake a new spirit on the Indian scene. The Allahabad session of the Congress in December 1910 decided to send a deputation to wait upon the new Viceroy. Among the members of the deputation were Dr. Hari Singh Gour and Shri R. N. Mudholkar from Madhya Pradesh. Sir William Wedderburn observed with some thrill that "this was the first time that the Congress was to be received in friendly personal recognition by a Viceroy." The delegation from this State felt they had special reason to be grateful to the new Viceroy because he gave them an assurance that a Legislative Council will soon be formed in Madhya Pradesh (Central Provinces and Berar, as it was then called).

After the Coronation of George V it was decided that the King and Queen should visit India and hold a durbar at Delhi. It was a spectacular ceremony, rivalling the pageantry of Curzon's durbar nine years ago. The King and Queen made their State entry into the historic capital of Delhi on 7th December 1911, and five days later, on 12th December the magnificent Coronation Durbar was held. The durbar was significant for other reasons as well, for it was here that the King announced the reversal of the partition of Bengal. East Bengal was rejoined to the rest of the province, and the seven-year-old injustice was atoned. At the same time Bihar, Orissa and Chhota Nagpur were formed into a separate province with Patna as capital, and Assam became a Chief Commissioner's province. Together with these changes the capital of India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi where a new city was to arise, magnificently planned and executed to be a worthy successor to the many Imperial Capitals that had flourished there in the past.

All these dramatic changes were calculated to capture the imagination of the people. There was, however, a shocking immediate sequel to this. On 23rd December 1911, the formal shifting of the capital to Delhi was marked by the ceremonial entry in State into Delhi by Lord Hardinge on a caparisoned elephant. While the grand procession was passing through the crowded street of Chandni Chowk, a bomb was thrown at the Viceroy, but luckily he was only slightly wounded in his back. Hardinge behaved with commendable calmness and the ceremony proceeded without a break. The Congress which met in Bankipur in 1912 under the presidentship of Shri R. N. Mudholkar sent a telegram of sympathy to Lord Hardinge and condemned the attack.

The year 1911 was significant for yet another reason. A determined effort was made by some leaders of Hindus and Muslims to bring about unity between the two communities. Hindu-Muslim conference was held for this purpose attended by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Surendranath Banerjea, Rahimtullah, Hassan Imam and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. *The Comrade*, a paper started by the Ali Brothers, urged the Muslim League to discard loyalism and communalism. The Anglo-Indian press exclaimed in great annoyance. "Why do these men want to unite the two communities, if it is not to unite them against the Government?" As a result of the Unity Conference, the next session of Muslim League under the presidentship of Sir Ibrahim Rahimtullah passed a resolution defining its object as the attainment of self-government under the British Empire. The Congress session at Karachi, which followed soon after, responded immediately and welcomed this statement of the League's aims, and gave "its complete accord with the belief, which the League has emphatically declared at its last sessions, that the political future of the country depends on the harmonious working and co-operation of the various communities in the country".

Thus by 1913 it looked as if a new era had begun of concerted action by all forward-looking elements in the country for winning freedom and self-government. In Madhya Pradesh too the long and unhappy regime of Sir Reginald Craddock ended, and he was succeeded by Sir Benjamin Robertson who appeared to share with the Viceroy an even, balanced temperament and a desire to do good if possible. It was during his time, on 8th November 1913 that the Central Provinces Legislative Council was formed, and the Viceroy accompanied by Lady Hardinge, came to Nagpur to lay the foundation stone. There were twenty-six members in the first

council of whom seven were selected by the Municipalities and District Boards, seven nominated by Government, two selected by Zamindars and landlords and ten Government officials. Thus technically a non-official majority was maintained. Among the first members were three congressmen of the moderate school, R. N. Mudholkar, Sir Moropant Joshi and Vishnudutt Shukla. But their voice was steadily ceasing to count with the Congress itself. New leadership had arisen which was more dynamic. The old guard diminished further with the passing away of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and, later, of Gokhale. A dynamic figure which for a brief period dominated the Congress appeared in Mrs. Besant. More decisive was the return of Tilak from his six long years of exile in Mandalay. And above all, on 4th August 1914, the World War broke out, overwhelming for a time all other thoughts. India too was automatically swept into the holocaust.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE COMMUNAL ISSUE

In the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century began the subtle and calculated attempt of the British Government to divide the Muslims from the large body of Indian public opinion, and especially to drive a wedge between them and the Hindus. We have already seen in an earlier chapter how in the seventies of the century, Englishmen were anxious to modify the hostility and suspicion with which they had treated the Muslims since the Revolt of 1857. This found clear expression in Sir William Hunter's book "The Indian Musalman" published in 1870 to which a reference has already been made. His thesis was that the Indian Musalman, especially the Muslim in Bengal, was psychologically divided from the Hindu, and that the policy of Government hitherto in education and administration had been resented, though silently, by the Muslim. "Our system of public administration conducts education in the vernacular of Bengal, a language which the Mohamadans despise, and by means of Hindu teachers whom the Muslim community hates." He describes "the illiterate and fanatical (Muslim) peasantry of East Bengal" who are said to be sworn rivals and despisers of the Hindu gentry.

A false picture repeated often enough tends to create a reality in its own image. It did not matter that the falsity of the picture was pointed out by sober writers. The *Indian Observer*, writing on 2nd November 1872, exposed the partisan views of Hunter. The paper said, "Such utterances as these from the ostensible mouth-piece of the Indian Government are calculated to create an entire misapprehension of the actual social and political position now occupied by the Bengali Musalmans. They can hardly enhance the writer's unenviable reputation for inaccuracy." In province after province the Muslim and Hindu population had lived together for centuries and had assimilated much of the local customs and habits, so that it was often difficult to tell the difference between them. "A Bengali Muslim is far near to a Bengali Hindu than he is to a Punjabi Muslim ; so also with others. If a number of Hindu and Muslim Bengalis happen to meet anywhere, they will immediately congregate together and feel at home with each other. Punjabis, whether Muslim or Hindu or Sikh, will do likewise. The Moslems of Bombay Presidency (Khojas, Memons, Bohras) have many Hindu customs." (Nehru: *Discovery of India*,

p. 397.) But it did not suit the foreigner's interests to permit such a welding together of the two great communities. They had long ago adopted the policy of "*Divide et impera*". This policy was bound to be particularly profitable in the sphere of communal relations.

A convenient instrument for the furtherance of this policy came handy to the British at this time, in the person of a distinguished Muslim whose ancestors were closely connected with the Moghul rule. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan was in British service during the time of the 1857 Revolt, and had helped the Government in those anxious days. He viewed the Government's attitude of suspicion and opposition to the Muslims after the 1857 movement with real alarm, and made it his mission to convince the Government that the Muslims were not, essentially and by religion, disloyal, and that they were not primarily responsible for the troubles of 1857. Sir Sayyid went to England in 1869, and was at once thrilled and amazed by the European civilization. On arriving in London he wrote home, saying, "the natives of India, high and low, merchants and petty shop-keepers, educated and illiterate, when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness, are as like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man." He said that now, not only did he understand why the Englishman in India treated the "natives" with contempt, but also he thought that they well deserved it (W. C. Smith: *Modern Islam in India*, p. 17.)

Here was a person whom the British Government could well use to break any cohesion that might develop between the Hindus and Moslems. Before returning to India, Sir Sayyid left behind his son to be educated at Cambridge. He himself soon after his return set about establishing a Muslim College where Indian Muslims could derive all the advantages of Western education. Government gave their blessings to this project; subscriptions were collected from the public, and in 1875 the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College was established at Aligarh. This College became a centre of British influence on the Muslim community. Destined to develop later on into the Aligarh University, the M. A. O. College was firmly pro-British and was intended to be modelled on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. It was different from a Christian Missionary College only in the fact that Islam was substituted for Christianity in the curriculum. The Prospectus of the College states the object as, "to establish a College in which the Musalmans may acquire an English education without prejudice to their religion". With this cultural allegiance to the West went

a political loyalty which was equally explicit. The College was expected to make the Muslims of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown. The founders made no secret of their admiration for the Rulers. The Address presented to the Viceroy on the occasion of laying the foundation stone of the College building, says, "The British rule in India is the most wonderful phenomenon the world has ever seen".

A succession of Britishers who were appointed Principals moulded the young people who joined the College, and even had a decisive influence on the community. Mr. Beck, who was the Principal from 1883 to 1899, played an important part in weaning away the Muslims from the growing national sentiment in the country. When the Congress was meeting in December 1887, Sir Sayyid called a Muslim Educational Conference in opposition to it. Next year he formed a Patriotic Association as a counterblast to the Congress, and a grateful British Government conferred on him the title of K.C.S.I. in the same year.

In an open letter published in 1888, Hume exposes this artificial opposition being engineered by the British element in India, and says, "this so-called Anti-Congress party owes its existence almost wholly to the promptings and support of a small but influential section of the Anglo-Indian party". He goes on to complain of the "frantic and unprincipled efforts of the Wahabi followers of Sir Syad Ahmad, to get-up rows and fights over the matter". (Quoted by Zacharias: *Renascent India*, p. 120). It is thus quite obvious that since about the last quarter of the nineteenth century the British authorities in India directly and covertly followed a policy of setting up the Muslim community against the Hindus and the Congress, and began to show marked favours, in the matter of appointments and promotions, to Muslims. For instance, a correspondent writing to the *Berar Mitra* of the 8th July 1879, refers to a statement which appeared in *Pramod Sindhu* of the 23rd June to the effect that one Sakharam Dattatreya, Tahsildar, had retired from service, and that it was rumoured that one Safdar Ali, a police sub-inspector, would be appointed to the vacant post. He says that if this report were true, the question arises if there were no better qualified candidates for the post. Commenting this subject the *Berar Mitra* editorially says, "There are six head clerks and six deputy clerks in the office of the Deputy Commissioners of the six districts, and several clerks of the Small Cause Courts in the province, and many naib-tahsildars. Some of them are acquainted with two or three languages, and have passed the lower and higher standard examinations, some have passed the

pleaders' examination, and some have been serving in the Revenue Department for the last fifteen years. The paper then concludes by posing the question, "Why is it that only Musalmans are appointed tahsildars these days?" The Editor does not pause for an answer. (*Berar Mitra*, 8th July 1879.)

As the Indian National Congress began to grow in strength and influence, and draw within its fold the educated middle class, including a fair number of Muslims, Government decided to bestir themselves. It will be seen that the Congress in 1885 was attended by only two Muslims, but the Calcutta Session in 1890 had as many as 156 Muslim delegates out of a total of 702 delegates, i.e., about 22 per cent. Government felt that they must draw away the Muslims and set them up as a counter-poise to the nationalists. As Sir John Strachey expressed it: "The existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of the strong points in our political situation in India. The better classes of Muhammadans are a source to us of strength and not of weakness. They constitute a comparatively small but energetic minority of the population, whose political interests are identical with ours." (Quoted by Smith, *Loc. cit.*, p. 167.) Some eminent Muslims were taking a leading part in the Congress movement. Mr. Justice Badruddin Tyabji presided over the 1887 Session of the Congress, while Mr. R. M. Sayani presided over the Session in 1896. On that occasion Sayani, referring to the signs of Muslim opposition to the Congress, said "It is imagined by some persons that all, or almost all, the Moslems of India are against the Congress movement: this is not true. Indeed by far the largest part do not know what the Congress movement is,"—which, incidentally, was not a very effective defence. However, it was easy to turn this ignorance into opposition to the national movement by the communalists and the bureaucracy. It was on this class of ignorant, and, to some extent, economically backward class of Muslims that Sir Sayyid Ahmad and his influential colleagues were able to use their influence. He was able to make the Muslims who did not join the Congress believe that it was not in their interests *as Muslims* to join it.

There is a good deal of evidence that the intercommunal antagonism which subsequently flared up into a furious rivalry, was deliberately fostered and encouraged by Whitehall and the Government of India. We have already seen the classic reply given by Lansdowne in 1890, that the Congress should be distinguished from "the great body of Conservative opinion" of which the Government was especially solicitous. It was, therefore, in the Government's interests to feed and strengthen this body of conservative

opinion, and they felt the Muslims were eminently qualified to join that body. By constant stirring up of religious, economic and political differences, they could start a process of hostility and rivalry between the two communities which would permanently keep them apart and necessitate the mediating presence of the Britisher in the country. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald in his "Awakening of India" admits that some European officers encouraged Muslims in creating the feeling of communalism and that they conspired in London and in the heights of Simla to engender rivalry and division.

It is significant that the cases of Hindu-Muslim clashes began to recur quite frequently from about a few years after the Aligarh College was established. By that time the Government which had at first been somewhat indulgent towards the Congress had begun to feel rather concerned about the growing influence of the national movement, and began their subtle policy of encouraging Muslim opposition. One fertile source of trouble was the playing of music before mosques and cow-slaughter. Neither of these had led to any rioting or clashes during all the centuries of common existence in the country. But from about 1886 onwards they began to recur with alarming frequency. In 1887 there was trouble in Burhanpur, a town with a large Muslim population. In that year Dussera and Moharrum fell on the same date. It was not a question of music before mosque that time; but it was complained that stones were thrown on the Tazias, and that was the signal for a riot. Once the trouble has been created, the Government had a way of showing its impartiality by arresting and sentencing an equal number of persons from each community. On this occasion Mr. Williams, the Assistant Commissioner, sentenced a Muslim Jamadar and Hindu to six months' imprisonment. Another outbreak occurred soon after at Ellichpur (Achalpur) on the occasion of Balaji procession. Mr. Nice, the Deputy Commissioner, had to take the military aid to control the mob, and, as usual, some arrests were made making sure that there was an equal number from each community. Another riot took place in Sendurjana under similar circumstances.

The epidemic nature of this trouble, which always took a certain set pattern, suggests that there was a design behind it. As yet its repercussions in the political sphere were not apparent. For instance, the only good feature about the Indian Councils Act of 1892 was that it did not contain any communal representation. In the nineteenth century the communal policy of Government appeared to be mainly concerned with creating a sense of distinction, of separate interests, between the Hindu and the Muslim. In



this process they also succeeded in injecting into the masses of the two communities a feeling of distrust and suspicion of each other. This feeling could always be trusted to flare up into open clash when opportunity was presented to it. It is a matter of common knowledge that the opposition of Muslims to music before mosques was a direct result of official encouragement. Similarly, the fullest advantage was taken of the Hindu opposition of cow-slaughter by conceding wherever possible the right of the Muslims to slaughter cows. There is also evidence to show that not only was the Muslim treated with special consideration but when an overzealous officer in the interest of law and order put down a Muslim mob of rioters with a firm hand, he was pulled up for his excessive zeal.

It is interesting to see with what tact the district officer of those days managed to enable the Muslim to get the best of both the worlds. In a certain village the Muslims objected to a Hindu procession simply on the ground that it was new. The Sub-Divisional Officer felt that the objection was baseless, that the procession would not go anywhere near the mosque, and that it should be permitted. But the Deputy Commissioner, a seasoned Englishman, told him that there would be trouble in the village if he allowed the procession, and though the trouble may not be serious, the Sub-Divisional Officer should use his own judgment, otherwise "in a year or two you would make the mistake on a larger scale and lose lives". The attitude was different when Muslim interest was involved. The Muslims wanted to take the Tazia in procession, and in that particular year the Tazia was built taller than usual, with the result that a branch of the *peepal* tree on the route would have to be cut to allow the Tazia to go under it, for the Muslims would refuse to lower or tilt the Tazia. The Hindus would naturally object to cutting the sacred *peepal* tree. The British tact worked in a different way this time. A few days before the procession, the Assistant Commissioner decided that a couple of elephants should be allowed to graze near the *peepal* tree. No one would object to that, and if a few branches of the tree were lopped off to feed the elephants, there would be nothing wrong. Is not the elephant sacred to the Hindus? So the thing was done, and on the day of the procession the loftier Tazia passed under the tree easily." (Philip Woodruff: *The Guardians*, Part I, Chap. IX.)

Communalism as a virulent malady did not assume serious proportions till the beginning of the twentieth century. We have already seen, in an earlier chapter, the stimulus given to it by Curzon's partition of Bengal. The question became at once a

Hindu-Muslim issue, as had perhaps been planned, and not a mere administrative question, as was made out. The poison of suspicion which the rulers had sedulously instilled into the two communities, the seeds of discord and hostility sown by them, now brought forth their result. The year after the partition of Bengal, in 1906, the Muslim League was formed through Government inspiration, and from this time onwards the policy of communalism was pursued by the Government in earnest. A deputation of loyalist Muslims led by Aga Khan met the Viceroy, Lord Minto, on 1st October 1906, who gave them every encouragement to organise a Muslim body which, while promoting the interests of the community, would loyally support the Government. Thus was born the Muslim League, and the new imperial policy of driving a wedge between the two communities.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the division between the two communities became an inescapable feature of Indian politics with the provision of separate electorates in the Minto-Morley Reforms. Lord Minto readily yielded to the importunities of the group of loyalist Muslims and established a precedent which has ever since vitiated public life, and inevitably led to the division of India. Minto assured them: "I am entirely in accord with you. I make no attempt to indicate by what means the representation of communities can be obtained, but I am as firmly convinced as I believe you to be, that any electoral representation in India would be doomed to mischievous failure which aimed at granting a personal enfranchisement regardless of the beliefs and traditions of the communities composing the population of this continent". Thus came into existence this pernicious principle which put a premium on communalism.

It was unfortunate that the office of the Secretary of State should have been held at this time by one who turned out to be among the least sympathetic and most autocratic Secretary of State ever seen in Whitehall. No one, it seems, can be more reactionary than a superannuated Liberal. Lord Morley frankly confessed his antipathy to the nationalist movement and said in a letter to Lady Minto, "the real truth is that I am an occidental, not an oriental. . . . I think I like the Indian Mohammadan, but I cannot go much farther in easterly direction". His obvious preference for the Muslim notwithstanding, he was not in favour of separate electorates. He mentions in his diary how separate electorates would inevitably delay the development of representative institutions. But Minto insisted on it, perhaps for this very reason. Thus began the evil which has perpetuated the chasm that divided the

Hindus and Muslims". Henceforward Moslems could only stand for election and be elected by separate Muslim electorates. A political barrier was created round them isolating them from the rest of India, and reversing the unifying and amalgamating process which had been going on for centuries and which was inevitably being speeded up by technological developments." (Nehru: *Discovery of India*, p. 422).

The communal issue thus became permanently aggravated. Within fifty years after the great Revolt of 1857 the two great communities which had shared in the trials and oppressions of those days, side by side, had become irreconcilably alienated from each other. No doubt, for a short while thereafter, when a younger generation of Moslems of ardent spirit came to the forefront, there was a brief reunion under the clouds of the World War I. But that was destined to be short-lived. Soon after the war ended, and the rulers once again came forward with half-hearted measures of reform, they were once more successful in sowing dissension between the communities and breaking up any prospect of a unity.

According to the Census of 1891, the Central Provinces had only about two lakhs Muslims in a total population of about 88 lakhs, and even after Berar was joined to the province the population of Muslims did not exceed about 4 per cent. The Muslims in this province were not appreciably influenced by the national movement, nor did they join the Congress. Some few prominent members of the community, no doubt, were associated with public organizations in which they worked with nationalist Hindus. For instance, a Young Men's Mohammadan Society founded in 1899 was inaugurated by Dadasaheb Khaparde who was made a life President, while Mr. Abdul Razaak Zakir was its Secretary. Mohammad Murtiza Khan of Seoni was a keen supporter of the Nagpur Gorakshan Sabha, and so was Khan Bahadur Malak of Nagpur who took an active part in propagating the disuse of beef as an article of food.

All this was before the formation of the Muslim League. The Chief Commissioner of Nagpur, Mr. (later Sir) Reginald Craddock, was largely instrumental in creating a gulf between the middle class Muslims and Hindus in this State. When he visited Amravati on 12th November 1906 he received an address of welcome from the Muslims of the town and praised them for their loyalty, pointing out that their welfare and interests lay in their keeping away from the Congress agitation. The Muslim community found in him a staunch supporter who implemented his communal policy in every department of administration—Education, Police, Forest, Executive

and Judicial. He had a special attraction for the products of Aligarh, and many an alumnus of that college had cause to be grateful to him for high appointments in this State. He hoped to buttress up the bureaucracy with the help of this material, because the peculiar training surcharged with a mixture of religious fervour and admiration for the West that characterised Aligarh at that time, could be trusted to foster in them an almost fanatical hostility to the Hindus.

The result of all this was that under the Craddock administration the cleavage between Hindus and Muslims in this State widened. This had a curious result. In the old days when the two communities were friendly, the predominantly Hindu population of Nagpur had elected eight Muslims out of a total membership of twenty-five of the Nagpur Municipal Committee. But now thanks to the sedulous anti-Hindu policy of the administration, in 1906, only three Muslims were elected in a municipal committee of 52 members. This was Sir Reginald Craddock's contribution to the civic life of Nagpur.

The Muslim League, which was born under the protective wings of Lord Minto, did not penetrate the Central Provinces for some time. The Delhi Session of the League held in 1909 under the presidentship of Aga Khan was attended by Khan Bahadur Malak of Nagpur. He undertook to establish the League in the Central Provinces and for this purpose invited the next session of the League to Nagpur. Mr. Mohammad Yusuf Khan of Delhi was deputed to this State to organise the League, and for five months he toured all the districts. Practically all the leading Muslims in the State joined the League and considerable enthusiasm prevailed among them during the League Session held at Nagpur on 30th December 1910. Barrister Syed Nabibulla presided over the session and Khan Bahadur H. M. Malak, Chairman of the Reception Committee, welcomed the delegates. Gratitude and loyalty to the Government were lavishly expressed, and special thanks were given to Lords Morley and Minto for appointing Syed Ali Imam in place of Lord Sinha in the Viceroy's Executive Council. One of the demands made was that a Muslim should be appointed Lieutenant-Governor. They acknowledged the generous support to Muslims which Chief Commissioner Craddock had given in this State and pleaded that Urdu language should be encouraged in every possible way. One of the resolutions passed by the conference urged the creation of a Legislative Council for the Central Provinces and Berar in which Muslims should be adequately represented. Sir Reginald Craddock himself attended the All-India

Muslim Education Conference held simultaneously with the League, and assured them that Government would give "sympathetic consideration" to the claims of Urdu. The Government of this State appointed a large number of Muslim officers out of all proportion to percentage of their population, and made it a point to appoint them in places where the nationalists were strong.

Thus, the State of Madhya Pradesh was also caught up in the maelstrom of communalism, and public life was punctuated by riots which occurred in regular succession in one town after another, connived at, if not engineered, by the British officers. One of them was in front of the Bhonsla palace itself where a Ganpati procession was stopped on the ground that it offended the Muslims. The dragon's teeth had begun to sprout forth an evil brood.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE CULT OF SWADESHI

Some one has said that India's independence is the triumph of the *Charkha* over the steam-mill. That statement is only a part of the truth, but it serves to throw into relief the vital role that the cult of swadeshi played in the freedom struggle. Long before the charkha became the symbol and inspiration of our political struggle, the urge for swadeshi had begun to stir people's hearts. It arose primarily from the decline and decay of Indian industries brought about by the commercial policy of Great Britain in India. As early as in 1834 Lord Bentinck had said, that "the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India". The imports from England into India went up phenomenally during the nineteenth century. They consisted of not only luxury articles such as leather goods, clocks and glassware, scents, cigarettes and sports requisites, but also household necessities, such as cotton goods, matches and soaps. India which had at first tempted the western imperialists by her exquisite products and her industrial prosperity steadily lost her export market and became a predominantly agricultural country, exporting only raw material for feeding the British factories. The cotton from the fields of Madhya Pradesh and other provinces was sent out only to come back from Manchester and Lancashire in a manufactured form.

It was not till after the Great Revolt of 1857 that Indian industries began to stir up from its long stupor. The first mill to be started in Bombay was in 1854, but by 1860 there were about twelve cotton mills, and in the next few years Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Sholapur also became centres of cotton industry. The magnates of Lancashire and Manchester were alarmed at this progress. Any threat to their interests was, in their view, a threat to the Empire, and in regard to India, British Parliament was always willing to be led by Lancashire. The Government of India had been levying a uniform import duty of five per cent on all manufactured goods coming into India. But in 1877, to pacify Lancashire, the manufactured cotton goods from England were exempted from this duty. Thus the little protection which this duty gave to the Indian industry disappeared. True the financial stringency forced Government of India to reimpose the duty later, but they took good care to neutralize any protective effect by imposing at

the same time an equivalent excise duty on cotton manufactures in India.

The duty on Indian manufactures produced vehement protests in the country. It is recorded that the weavers of Nagpur met in May 1888 and expressed their resentment against the import of British and foreign cloth which was destroying their industry. They passed a resolution calling upon all members of their community not to use or trade in the products of foreign mills. Any one who violated the resolution was to be ex-communicated. Probably this is the earliest known evidence of Swadeshi spirit in this State, long before it became a political weapon. In October 1890 the foundation stone of the Swadeshi Mills—now called Model Mills was laid in Nagpur. It is significant that among its first Directors were the leaders of the Congress in the State namely, Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis, Shri Gopalrao Bhide, Rao Bahadur Mukundrao Buty, Shri Gopalrao Ghatate and others. Nagpur already had the Empress Mills, established by the Tatas.

The levy of a tax on the home-made cotton goods was publicly condemned as being iniquitous. In many parts of the province protest meetings were held and people were urged to use only swadeshi cloth. *The Berar Samachar* of 20th August 1894 editorially called upon the people to oppose the influence of Manchester on Indian administration and said that if we had any spirit of nationalism we should resolve firmly to use only swadeshi. This would be a fitting reply to the anti-Indian policy of Government. Meetings were held in many places and people took an oath to use swadeshi. Reports of such gatherings appeared in the *Berar Samachar* of 9th March 1896. It is thus clear that ten years before Surendranath Banerjee led a raging campaign of Swadeshi in Bengal, the movement had already spread widely in Madhya Pradesh. The festival of Holi in 1896 was celebrated with bonfire of foreign cloth. Even in villages the movement was taken up with enthusiasm. Songs on the virtues of Swadeshi were sung by village children. Dr. Birdwood drew the attention of the Government at that time to these folk songs and said: "ye may laugh at these songs as a futile attempt to shut out the English machine-made cheaper goods as against hand-made costlier ones. But little do we think what this movement is likely to grow into and what new phases it may take in time. The songs are at present directed against English wares, but they also are a natural and effective preparation against other English things as well."

Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century the spirit of Swadeshi had captured the people's minds. There were some

moderates who were doubtful about the economic soundness of Swadeshi, but the popular reaction was that whatever the economic point of view might be, it was certainly a necessity from the political point of view. It should be remembered that the Swadeshi movement at this stage was not insistent on hand-spun and hand-woven cloth: it stood for the use of Indian made cloth, whether by mills or by craftsmen, as well as other Indian made articles. Therefore, the movement had the support of the owners of Indian mills and factories. It stimulated the industrialisation of the country and encouraged Indian capital formation. Thus, while in 1880 there were only 58 cotton mills in the whole country, the number increased to 264 by 1914 employing nearly three lakhs of people. There were 64 Jute mills in 1914 as against 22 in 1880.

It will thus be clear that when the drastic policies of Curzon alienated nationalist opinion in the country, the people naturally thought of the weapon of Swadeshi as an effective instrument with which the country could express its disapproval. Swadeshi and boycott are the obverse and reverse sides of the same coin. Swadeshi movement necessarily involved the boycott of foreign goods. The contemporary issue of *Berar Samachar*, dated 28th August 1905, said: "We are thankful to Lord Curzon whose administration full of *zuloom* has awakened in Indians the spirit of self-respect. It has transformed our life. Congress has started the Swadeshi movement. People in their thousands are gathering round the Congress and have consistently begun to boycott English goods, particularly cloth. It is really inspiring to see how throughout the nook and corner of India there is unprecedented enthusiasm among the people for Swadeshi. Swadeshi has become the cementing force uniting all India into one."

The first time the Congress referred to the Indian cotton industry was in connection with the imposition of an excise duty on cloth to counter-balance the import duty. At the Allahabad session of the Congress in 1902, D. E. Wachha moved the resolution that the  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent excise duty on cloth manufactured by means of powerlooms in India would not only arrest the free growth of the weaving industry, but also impose serious hardship on the masses of the people who consume the coarser indigenous products. But it was not till the partition of Bengal which threw the country into a state of furious agitation, that the Congress adopted a resolution supporting the Swadeshi movement and endorsing the policy of boycott of foreign goods. In August 1905 a *paisa fund* was started to propagate Swadeshi. Meetings were addressed by Dadasaheb Khaparde in Nagpur and Amravati



asking the people, especially the student population to support the Swadeshi movement. The articles of Tilak in his *Kesari* gave a powerful stimulus to the movement and the atmosphere in this State, as indeed in the major part of the country became surcharged with the spirit of Swadeshi. The students were the most susceptible to its influence, much to the annoyance of the officers of the Education Department. At Amravati some students were expelled from the Hostel, but promptly a National School was opened in September 1905 through the initiative of Shri Wamanrao Joshi and others, and the expelled students were taken care of. Tilak's tour of the Central Provinces in 1905 further strengthened the movement.

It was at this time that the movement spread vigorously in Bengal as the people's answer to the partition. Swadeshi and Boycott gave them a two-edged sword with which to fight the injustices committed by Curzon. Surendranath Banerjee, in his book '*A Nation in the Making*' describes in detail how this policy was adopted by them. They were anxious that it should not antagonise the non-official British public because the tradition of the Congress elders still was to win and preserve the goodwill of the Britishers. Therefore, Surendranath Banerjee says, "the only objection that was felt and seriously discussed was, how it would affect our English friends. Would they approve of it? Would they sympathise with it? Might they not regard it as an open avowal of ill-will? For, as I have already observed, there were many Englishmen in Calcutta who strongly disapproved of the partition, and of the form and manner in which it was carried out. They were helping us with their advice and the weight of their moral support. We were anxious that we should do nothing to alienate them. . . . How foolish it would have been to have made an appeal to the British public for the reversal of an order of the Government of India by starting an anti-British movement"

The British were, however, inclined to view the whole thing with supercilious amusement, though they probably realised that it had harmful possibilities. *The Statesman*, for example, said "Those who are responsible for the boycott resolution have doubtless been fired by the example of the Chinese, and they are optimistic enough to assume that a boycott of European goods could be made as effective and as damaging as the Chinese boycott of American goods has, to all appearance, been. The assumption will cause a smile on the European side for more reasons than one. But all the same it would be unwise for the Government to assume

that the whole movement is mere froth and insincerity." It was only later, when the success of the movement took the Britishers by surprise that their attitude changed to one of fierce bitterness.

The movement gained amazing momentum. In June 1906 Tilak spoke in the Benigir Theatre at Nagpur on the subject of Swadeshi. Nearly six thousand persons were said to be present at the meeting. Another meeting attended by about 4,000 merchants was held at the Balaji Mandir, and Tilak *adjured* them not to trade in foreign cloth and sugar. The *Deshsewak* of 30th June 1906 reported that 300 traders of Nagpur had taken a vow not to deal in foreign goods. Yet another meeting was addressed in Nagpur by Dadasaheb Khaparde at which the students made a bonfire of their foreign caps.

The Calcutta session of the Congress in 1906 which was momentous in many respects passed two resolutions endorsing Swadeshi and Boycott. Regarding the former, it said: "This congress accords its most cordial support to the Swadeshi movement and calls upon the people of the country to labour for its success, by making earnest and sustained efforts to promote the growth of indigenous industries and to stimulate the production of indigenous articles by giving them preference over imported commodities even at some sacrifice." The wording is cautious, but it clearly marks the acceptance by the Congress of the principle of Swadeshi. The Resolution on Boycott is also carefully worded and gives the support of the Congress to the movement started in Bengal. It said, "Having regard to the fact that the people of this country have little or no voice in its administration, and that their representatives to the Government do not receive due consideration, this congress is of opinion that the Boycott Movement inaugurated in Bengal by way of protest against the partition of that province, was, and is, legitimate."

These two resolutions together with two others on National Education and on Swaraj constituted the major items of discussion at this important sessions. It was clearly an achievement for which the extremist wing took the credit. Bipin Chandra Pal, Tilak, Lajpatrai all spoke strongly in favour of the resolutions. They were supported by the Bengal delegates. For about six years boycott and Swadeshi occupied the first place in the speeches and activities of the national leaders, and their effect upon the life of the people and on the policy of Government was unique. It was apparent that a new spirit had arisen in the country which would not be put down, which was determined to get the national

demand heard, and go to any lengths to make Government respond to it. In the words of Surendranath Banerjee, "Our rulers must recognise the new spirit, born, it may be of the huge blunder of the Partition, vibrating through our hearts, uplifting us to a higher plane of political effort."

But the response which the Government gave was one of unheeding repression. They banned the singing of *Vande Mataram*, which only made the students of schools and colleges and even smaller children sing it vociferously, which led to the arrests and caning of large numbers of them. In the Congress itself, as noted earlier, the extremist school of thought became increasingly restive under the strain of Government's repressive action. Their exponent was Lokmanya Tilak who, speaking at Raipur gave vehement expression to their views:

For the last twenty years the Congress had demanded justice and sympathy from Government, and merely opposed it by words. This had produced no results. On the other hand our rights were unjustly taken away. Therefore we must have recourse to some strong measures so that Government may realise that the resolutions of the weak have all the power which can control the repressive policy of the Government. The moderates were certainly dissatisfied with the repressive policy of Government but they only want to follow constitutional methods, but the Government is all powerful and the country is so weak. They also want to agitate, but in such a way that Government may not get angry. They accept Swadeshi but are chary to accept boycott because the word 'Boycott' indicates opposition to Government. But the Britishers know very well that when Swadeshi is accepted, boycott follows necessarily, and they know that apart from the economic aspect of it, these methods are merely blinds for political action. Quoting Lord Curzon's words before the Chamber of Commerce, that "my work lies in administration, yours in exploitation", he pointed out that both are aspects of the same question and the same duty. He compared the condition of India in the previous century when at least 15 crores of goods were exported from the country, when women working on the Charkha earned lakhs of rupees. All this has been ruined by the policy of Government by which it was laid down that any person selling Indian cloth in England will be fined Rs. 200 and those who wear it will be fined Rs. 50. But hopes which had arisen in 1858 when the governance of the country passed into the hands of Parliament were all dashed to the ground. The small import duty on English cloth was abolished and the export was made free. To top all, an excise duty of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent

was saddled on Indian manufacture of cloth. Therefore we the people were urged to adopt swadeshi and boycott in order to secure Swaraj.

The years that followed were years of rapidly growing tension. We have seen in an earlier chapter the efforts of Lord Minto to checkmate the national movement by bolstering up the moslems on the one hand, and placating the moderates with crumbs of constitutional reforms. The prevalent temper of the time is brought out in a long interview that Dr. Munje had on 29th November 1908 with Sir Charls Cleveland, the Inspector-General of Police. Dr. Munje explained the object of the boycott movement and asserted that the Congress did not support violence. There was nothing secret in the organisation of the nationalist party, and it had the support of all sections of the people, except perhaps the Muslims. He said that the nationalists were in favour of universal boycott. The *mushiti* fund and the *paisa* fund were part of the organisation of nationalists and all collections were used for furthering the national cause. The conviction and exile of Lokmanya Tilak had caused great pain to the whole nation, and equally unjust was the conviction of Arvind Ghosh. He defended the agitation of the students but did not approve of any violent activity. No doubt Mr. Munje's exposition made no impression on the Inspector-General of Police who maintained that all the trouble in the province was engineered by the nationalists.

The increasing participation by students in the Swadeshi and boycott movement and in political agitation generally was viewed with disapproval also by the moderate leaders of the Congress. It will be remembered that in Nagpur the students' agitation flared up after the boycott movement was inaugurated by the extremist wing. The students of the Hislop College demonstrated in 1907 and in the following year the European Principal of the Morris College (Nagpur Mahavidyalaya) was roughly handled. In connection with the mutilation of Queen Victoria's statue, the authorities carried out searches of students' rooms in the Agriculture College Hostel, and several students were arrested. The moderates' view on the students' participation in political agitation is lucidly explained by Gokhale when he spoke to a students' gathering in Bombay on 9th October 1909. Some portions of it are quoted, as it brings out the widening gulf between the moderate and the extremist opinion on this subject.

"The active participation of students in political agitation really tends to lower the dignity and the responsible character of public life and impair its true effectiveness. It also fills the

students themselves with unhealthy excitement, often evoking in them a bitter partisan spirit which cannot fail to interfere with their studies and prove injurious to their intellectual and moral growth . . . I venture to think that a stage has been reached in our affairs when it is necessary for us to face resolutely our responsibilities in this matter. Every one knows that during the past few years a new school of political thought has arisen in the country, and that it has exercised a powerful fascination over the minds of young men more or less in all parts of India. A considerable part of what it has preached could not but find ready acceptance on every hand, that love of country should be a ruling principle of our lives; that we should rejoice in making sacrifices for her sake; that we should rely, wherever we could, on our own exertions . . . Side by side with this undoubtedly valuable work, the new party gave to the country a great deal of what could only be regarded as unsound political teaching. That teaching was in the first instance directed to the destruction of the very foundations of the old public life of the country. But, once started, it could not be confined to that object, and in course of time it came to be applied generally. Its chief error lies in ignoring all historical considerations and tracing our political troubles to the existence of a foreign Government in the country. Our old public life was based on frank and loyal acceptance of British rule, due to a recognition of the fact that it alone could secure to the country the peace and order which were necessary for slowly evolving a nation out of the heterogeneous elements of which India was composed, and for ensuring to it a steady advance in different directions. The new teaching condemns all faith in the British Government as childish and all hope of real progress under it as all vain. Not many of us care to think for ourselves in political matters, or, for the matter of that, in any public matters. Ready-made opinions are as convenient as ready-made clothes and so noticeable. . . . I think those of our public men who realise the harm which the new teaching has done, have not so far done their duty by the student community of this country. . . . I feel that it is now incumbent on us to speak out freely. As I have said, the self-reliance which is part of the new propaganda cannot but be acceptable to all. It is in regard to the attitude toward the Government which the programme advocates that the need for a protest and a warning arises. . . . When one talks to young men of independence in a country like this, only two ideas are likely to present themselves clearly before their minds. One is how to get rid of the foreigner, and the other is how soon to get rid of him. All else must appear to them as comparatively of minor

importance. . . We have to recognise that British rule, in spite of its inevitable drawbacks as a foreign rule, has been on the whole a great instrument of progress for our people. Our rulers stand pledged to extend to us equality of treatment with themselves. This equality is to be sought in two fields: equality for individual Indians with individual Englishmen, and equality in regard to the form of government which Englishmen enjoy in other parts of the Empire. The attainment of full equality with Englishmen, if ever it is accomplished, is bound to be a slow and weary affair. But one thing is clear. It is both our right and our duty to press along this road, and further, good faith requires that we should not think of taking any other. Of the twofold equality we have to seek with Englishmen, the first, though difficult of attainment, is not so difficult as the second. For it is possible to find in this country a fair number of Indians who in character and capacity could hold their own against individual Englishmen. But the attainment of a democratic form of self-government such as obtains in other parts of the Empire must depend upon the average strength in character and capacity of our people taken as a whole, for it is on our average strength that the weight of the edifice of self-government will have to rest. And here it must be regretfully admitted that our average strength today is far below the British average. The most important work before us, therefore, is to endeavour to raise this average. There is work enough for the most enthusiastic lover of his country. In fact on every side, whichever way we turn, only one sight meets the eye—that of work to be done—and only one cry is heard—that there are but few faithful workers. The elevation of the depressed classes, who have to be brought up to the level of the rest of our people, universal elementary education, co-operation, improvement of the economic condition of the peasantry, higher education of women, spread of industrial and technical education and building up the industrial strength of the country, promotion of closer relations between the different communities—these are some of the tasks which lie in front of us, and each needs a whole army of devoted missionaries.” It is clear that Gokhale’s thoughts were taking other paths of national work. Three years ago he had founded the Servants of India Society, about which we shall see more in detail later.

Meanwhile, the British were trying to rally to their support all reactionary elements. Sir Reginald held a durbar at Amravati for distributing Sanads to title-holders after which he addressed the recipients of the titles and anathemised the nationalists to his heart’s content. He described them as irresponsible persons and

enemies of the country, whereas the Government servants and the moderates were the true friends of the people. The British attitude became more and more exasperated as the Swadeshi movement increased in strength and the boycott began to tell upon British trade interests. Swadesism swept the whole country. It particularly caught the imagination of the youth. No school boy or college student dare enter the class-room in foreign clothes. Surendranath Banerjee narrates how the students of Ripon College in a body refused to write their answers in an examination until answer-books made with Indian paper was supplied to them. A little girl not more than six years of age refused to accept a present because it was a British-made doll. Marriage presents if foreign made were returned, and priests declined to perform their duties if the offerings brought to the temples contained any foreign articles. The people were caught in a mighty wave of emotion: sometimes perhaps it uplifted them above the plane of reason and judgment. But it united them as never before, and the rulers were amazed at its dynamic power.

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## CHAPTER VII

### WIDENING HORIZONS

The national ferment had a leavening effect upon the life of the people and produced a quickening of their activities in more spheres than that of political agitation. Even in the field of politics, the waves of the all-India movements caused a stirring of the Provincial waters. Local leaders of thought began to bestir themselves about the needs and grievances of the province. The first Provincial Conference in Madhya Pradesh was held in 1905, although previously a Berar Political Conference had met in 1896 prior to Berar's merging with the Central Provinces. That conference was not, however, continued in regular annual sessions. The Provincial Conference of 1905 was intended to be the first of a series of annual sessions to follow subsequently, meeting at different district towns. It was probably a course of lectures delivered in Nagpur by Mrs. Besant in February 1905 that suggested to the Congress leaders in the province the idea of a Provincial Conference. At any rate, it was soon after, on 22nd April 1905 that the first Provincial Conference met at Nagpur with Dadasaheb Khaparde, as President. Sir Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis was Chairman of the Reception Committee, and among those who spoke was Sir M. B. Dadabhoy. The themes of the speeches and the resolutions were devoted mainly to provincial questions. They asked for the abolition of the Patwari Cess, and of *begar* and other forms of forced labour when officers went on tours: they demanded a seat in the Imperial Council for a representative from the province, and the establishment of a High Court and a University in the Central Provinces. They wanted the province to be raised to the status of a Lieutenant-Governorship and asked for the revision of Land Revenue and Tenancy Acts. It is, thus, clear that the Provincial Conference confined its attention largely, if not wholly, to local matters. The tone and the scope of the Conference did not satisfy the restive younger generation who, it will be remembered, had begun to ask for a definite voice in the public affairs of the country. Sir Gangadharao Chitnavis, who was the Chairman of the Reception Committee, took note of this sentiment saying, "some dissatisfaction has been expressed that we did not recommend for your consideration a more ambitious programme, but it is hoped that our modest programme will lead to greater things hereafter, and that the mutual confidence between Government and the people will grow and enable the province to achieve



great improvement as the result of our co-operation". It was clear that the gulf between the older leadership and the aspirations of the rising generation was already wide.

The Provincial Conference next year, 1906, was held at Jabalpur, this time with Sir Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis, as President. It was, therefore, to be expected that this session would also maintain the placid moderate tone. The President welcomed the forthcoming visit of the Prince of Wales (later George V) and the Princess to India, and proceeded to refer disparagingly to the activities of the progressive wing of the national movement. As regards *Swadeshi* he asked "who was opposed to it" but added that it should not be used as a political weapon. On this issue, there was already a sharp difference in the Conference. Khaparde wanted the Conference to accept a resolution on *Swadeshi*, and although the moderates disapproved of it, the resolution was passed. The breach became more pronounced in the Third Provincial Conference which met at Raipur in March 1907. Shri R. N. Mudholkar presided and Dr. Hari Singh Gour was Chairman of the Reception Committee. The disagreement between Dahasaheb Khaparde and the organisers of the Conference became apparent from the very outset, and it became so irreconcilable that Khaparde did not participate in the proceedings. He was lodged separately at Raipur and later addressed a public meeting which was largely attended. As mentioned already in an earlier chapter, his exposition of *Swadeshi* was well received, and he seemed to have carried public opinion with him more decisively than the Provincial Conference. The fact is that public opinion was progressing more rapidly than the elder leaders would like it to do, with the result that they were quickly left behind. The proceedings of the Conference reflect this rather out-of-date attitude: "The Conference demanded separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, a Legislative Council for the Central Provinces, more literary, scientific and technical education, and a revision of Land Revenue". In other words, it merely repeated the usual resolutions of the Congress.

In 1907, came the split in the Congress ranks which divided political opinion in Madhya Pradesh as sharply as in other provinces, with this difference that the overwhelming support in this State was with Tilak and the extremists. This was obvious even at the Raipur Session of the Provincial Conference. The youth and the general public of the town were influenced far more by Khaparde representing the Tilak School than by Mudholkar, Hari Singh Gour and others of the moderate wing. The result of the 1907 split was that the annual sessions of the Provincial Conference

were discontinued. It was not till 1915 that the Conference met again but in the first resolution passed at that session it was affirmed that the Conference was the fourth in the series and was a continuation of the Raipur Conference. Thus, the chain was resumed and we shall see in a later chapter its future course. What is noteworthy is that these Provincial Conferences helped to spread political consciousness into the districts, and paved the way for the mass awakening, which is the feature of the final stage of the struggle.

The widening horizons comprehended other spheres of national life as well. One of these resulted in the evolution of a national language. As long back as 1888, Lokmanya Tilak had asserted in the *Kesari* that Hindi should be the national language. But it was not till 1910 that the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan was established owing to the efforts of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. In this province, Madhavrao Sapre, who since tendering his apology in the *Hindi Kesari* case had gone out of political journalism, started the *Chhattisgarh Mitra* in Raipur to serve the cause of Hindi language. Many representatives from this province attended the first meeting of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan called by Pandit Malaviya, and the movement spread rapidly. A session of the Hindi Sahitya Parishad was presided over by Mr Justice Hasan Imam which provoked the All-India Urdu Conference in 1912 to pass a resolution condemning him. In Madhya Pradesh, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan found increasing support guided by Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukla and Madhavrao Sapre.

Another movement which emerged on the horizon of national movement was Prohibition and the picketing of liquor shops. The Congress had for a long time passed resolutions urging the abolition of the drink evil. It was not only a social curse, but also a national drain owing to increasing imports of foreign liquor. The All-India Temperance Conference was established in 1902 and met regularly along with the annual sessions of the Congress. It was, however, not till 1907, when Swadeshi movement had gained a powerful hold of the people, that the Prohibition idea began to express itself in an active and practical form. The students, who were already in the thick of the Swadeshi agitation, now carried forward the movement to educate the people about the drink evil. The press gave daily accounts of how many persons in different towns had taken anti-drink vows. Panchayats were established at which the offenders were socially punished. The movement gained considerable strength in Bengal, Central Provinces and Bombay, and it naturally roused the Government. Prohibition workers

were the targets of Governmental disfavour, and though Government could not very well make Prohibition a crime, they found some ground or other to prosecute the workers who were asked to give an undertaking that they would not take part in the agitation against the drink evil. To save their face, Government said that if the people of any locality protested, the liquor shops there would be removed, but in actual practice even when the people of the locality picketed the shops, the police were after the picketers. In Nagpur, the picketing of liquor shops continued steadily from 1907 to 1908, especially in the mill areas. A branch of the All-India Temperance Conference had been established in Nagpur with Professor Bhagirath Prasad, as its chief worker. He strenuously carried forward the movement till about 1910 after which others in the Congress took up the work. The attitude of the local officers is revealed by a report that appeared in *Hindi Kesari* of 13th June 1908. It said that in the village Takli, near Nagpur, "the Tahsildar told the villagers that if any body asked them not to drink they should not listen to him. Drink was their ancestral custom and was necessary to refresh a tired man. Therefore, he advised them not to give up drink". But the movement made considerable progress especially in industrial areas. A huge meeting of mill labourers was held in the Raghuvir Theatre in Nagpur on 26th April 1908 with Bhasker Rao Pandit as Chairman. Dr. Munje and Swami Shankaranand advised the labourers that instead of spending their money on the pernicious liquor they would be doing a national service if they contributed it to the *Mushti* fund and the *paisa* fund. The Prohibition movement continued to be a major stream that strengthened the freedom struggle, and gained in importance in later years.

In 1905, Gopal Krishna Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society, with the object of training "national missionaries for the service of India and to promote, by all constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people". Although this Society never had any large following, its contribution to the national movement cannot be ignored. Its members lived up to the pledge they took to be "prepared to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit". Shortly before founding the Society, Gokhale visited Nagpur and was the guest of Sir Bipin Krishna Bose. He explained to his host his project, saying that in our country there has always been the institution of sanyasis who, surrendering all worldly desires, consecrated themselves to the service of the Divine. Then, why should such a nation not find devotees willing to consecrate their lives to the service of their motherland in the spirit of

religious sanyasis? "I told him", says Sir Bipin, "that this was exactly the idea our immortal Bankim has developed in his *Anand-math*, and the *Vande mataram* song was the outward manifestation of this spiritual patriotism". Gokhale agreed with him and said that he had thought long and deep on the subject and had made up his mind to launch his scheme in the hope that the salvation of the country lay in such service. (Sir B. K. Bose: *Incidents of My Life*.) The members of the Society have, in different spheres, justified the hope entertained by the founder Gokhale himself, Srinivasa Sastri, Hridayanath Kunzru, N. M. Joshi, Sri Ram Bajpai—each has served the country nobly in his sphere of work. As Gokhale said, "whether such members in future were to run schools, or papers or legislatures or co-operative societies, or slum work—that was not of importance, but what was to be the distinctive feature, the indispensable characteristic of any such work, was the fact that it was to be undertaken for its own sake, as a good work which is its own end, not for the furtherance of a party, or a class or a corporation or—least of all—for personal aggrandisement". A branch of the Society was established in Nagpur with Shri N. A. Dravid as the member-in-charge of it.

Political life during 1911 and 1912 was comparatively quiescent. The reversal of the Partition of Bengal had for a time stilled the storms of agitation. The newly-formed Councils both in the provinces and in the capital took to their placid, if ineffective, tasks with competence. The Imperial Council, however, was somewhat vitalised by its able Indian representatives. The Elementary Education Bill, on the contrary, found general support in the country but was, nevertheless defeated, all the official members voting against it. Another Bill brought up by Gokhale for preventing indentured labour going outside India had similar fate, while a Bill by Sir M. B. Dadabhoy to set apart a portion of the money earned by prisoners by their work to be given to them on release, was withdrawn by the mover owing to official opposition. It was repeatedly demonstrated, if it was not already self-evident, that the Councils of 1909 were meaningless and expensive ornaments which could achieve nothing contrary to the wishes of Government. An achievement in the field of education worthy of note during this period was the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was the moving spirit behind this, and he came to Jabalpur in 1912 in his campaign to collect funds. Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukla and Diwan Bahadur Vallabhdas were entrusted with this work in this State. Three years later, in 1915, the Viceroy laid the foundation-stone of the University at Banaras.

One form of rallying political opinion, which became popular during this period, is significant because it has survived up to the present day and has contributed to the militancy of the freedom movement. It is the Shivaji Cult, popularised by Lokmanya Tilak who chose this dynamic and inspiring leader as the symbol of the national struggle. The first celebrations of Shivaji Day were held in the famous fort of Raigarh near Poona in 1896. Later, in 1906, Tilak gave an exposition of the Shivaji Cult in a speech at Calcutta. Echoing his words, the *Bharat Mitra* wrote on 7th June 1906 that Shivaji's birthday should be celebrated throughout the country, and although the conditions in the country were today far different, and the forces opposed to us superior, yet if we emulated his courage and patriotism and his devotion to the cause, we should succeed. From 1905 onwards the Shivaji Utsav was celebrated every year in a number of cities and even in many villages. At a meeting held in Akola in 1908, Dadasaheb Khaparde expounded the significance of the day, and pointed out how the celebration of Shivaji's birthday was more important to the country than the birthdays of Shri Rama and Shri Krishna (see Appendix B for a summary of the speech published in the contemporary issue of *Hindi Kesari*).

In 1912 the Government of India was anxious about the possibilities of a war breaking out in Europe. In that event, they were uncertain of the repercussions that it may have in India. A committee was appointed at that time to assess the situation in India, and this committee issued a comprehensive questionnaire to all heads of provinces. The answers to some of the questions given by the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces are quoted below as they serve as an useful summary of the situation as reviewed by Government before the war broke out.

Question 14: In times of disturbance what do you consider the principal centres in the Central Provinces from which danger is to be apprehended?

Answer: The extremist party is most active in Berar and in the Maratha districts of the province. There is no garrison in Berar and disturbances in sympathy or in concert with outbreaks in other parts of the country might occur in any of the headquarters towns. The Chief Commissioner, from his experience of Berar, believes that in the country parts, the people would not readily join in any such movement. As already remarked, the influence of the civil officer still stands for a good deal in a part of the country where the administration has been conducted on rather

paternal lines. And the village officers in Berar are a particularly well-disposed set of men and would not readily risk their positions by going against the Government.

Of the Nagpur country, it is probable that the same might to a large extent he said. Only in the towns would there be a serious response to a general call to a rising, and even in these it is likely that a very considerable portion of the populace would range itself on the side of Government. In the northern and eastern parts of the province it is probable that the people would be slow to move in the direction of rising. Much would, of course, depend on the success with which such a rising met at the outset. The personal opinion of the Chief Commissioner is that, though local outbreaks might undoubtedly be looked for in the south and west, the rest of the provinces would remain fairly secure for some time, and by then an improvement in the general situation might reasonably be looked.

Question 16: What are the most important societies at work in the Central Provinces with political or quasi-political objects in view?

Answer: The Arya Samaj and the Moslem League both have branches in the Central Provinces, but neither of them is particularly strong or possesses much influence. The Chief Commissioner believes that in these provinces the Arya Samaj movement is chiefly confined to the religious side. The Moslem League is purely political, but Muhammadans are not very numerous in these provinces, and the Provincial Branch of the League does not possess much local influence. There are Gorakshan Sabhas in every part of the province, but it is believed that they are not connected with any central body but are purely local institutions. A few years ago there was a dangerous political society with its headquarters in Nagpur known as the Rashtriya Mandal, but it was broken up by Mr. Cleveland (now Sir Charles) in 1909, and if any relics of it still survive they keep themselves very quiet. If they break out at all it is in the form of some religious movement such as the deification of Shivaji.

Question 19: Are political agitators in the Central Provinces in communication with those elsewhere?

Answer: There is no doubt that the political agitators of the Central Provinces were in communication on the one side with the Bengal agitators and on the other side with those of Poona and Nasik. Khaparde of Amravati was generally considered to be the Lieutenant of Tilak. The agitators of Nagpur were closely connected

with Khaparde and his friends in Berar, and were also in touch with the leaders of sedition in Bengal during the years 1906 to 1909. There was also evidence that the Bengal agitators attempted to establish a connection with the Maratha Brahmins in Sagar, while a branch of the Brahmacharis of Bengal is also established for a short time in Jabalpur where a certain number of Bengalis have settled. The Nasik conspirators were undoubtedly in connection with some of the disaffected Brahmins in Berar.

Question 20: Did the deportation of Lajpat Rai in 1907 and the subsequent incarceration of Tilak exercise any influence on the political activities of the anti-British agitators in the Central Provinces?

Answer: There is nothing to show that the deportation of Lajpat Rai had much effect on local agitation, though it is understood that to some extent it caused waverers to draw back. The prosecution and conviction of Tilak, on the other hand, had a somewhat exasperating effect on local extremists. The conviction of Tilak was followed by an attempt to raise a disturbance in Nagpur itself, which, however, was speedily quelled, and this was followed later on by defilement of the statue of Queen Victoria. It was the investigation into this latter performance which led to the final break-up of the local political societies by Mr. Cleveland (now Sir Charles).

Question 21: What influence have the Ganapati and anti-cow-killing movements and the Shivaji cult in the Central Provinces? Are they still made use of for political purposes?

Answer: The anti-cow-killing movement has not had much influence in this province. There are 35 Gorakshan Sabhas in the provinces, all small, but they keep the movement alive. The movement was useful in the old days when disloyalty showed itself insidiously, but as soon as agitation came out into the open it was found to be too tame, and was discarded for more rabid methods. Recently Sorabji Jassawalla has been able to collect a good deal of money to enable him to go to England and start a society there. The movement is one that most Hindus will support without any political bias.

The Ganapati celebrations are still alive and are kept up wholly for political reasons. Last year the celebrations were held at Amravati, Nagpur, Yeotmal, Hoshangabad and at Bina and Bhopal within railway jurisdiction. The only noticeable feature was the temper shown by the Nagpur Nationalists over the action of the

District Superintendent of Police, who refused to allow the Ganapati to be worshipped while the portraits of Tilak and Shivaji were displayed at the mandal.

The Shivaji celebrations were also political only. They were held in Nagpur, Yeotmal and Amravati this year. Central Provinces agitators also visited Poona, where it was remarked that their speeches were more rabid than those made by the local speakers.

As regards the influence of these methods of agitation, they are not now used so much as a means of gathering recruits as of collecting sympathisers together and affording a meeting place where sedition can be discussed.

Question 24: What do you consider the attitude and political importance of the National Congress in the Central Provinces? Do you think that the complete local autonomy advocated by the Congress is a serious aspiration?

Answer: The Chief Commissioner is not disposed to attach much weight to the influence of the National Congress in the Central Provinces. It has its following amongst the educated classes in the towns, whose views may be taken as the stereotyped ones of the Congress. But since the succession of the extremist party and the considerable harrying which the more dangerous local representatives of the latter have undergone, there has been a general disposition even amongst men of the moderate school to give politics a bit of a rest and not say much which might in any way embarrass Government. There has in short been rather a lull, so far as the local energies of the Congress are concerned. The Chief Commissioner has not yet ascertained how far the local autonomy idea has taken root here.

Question 25: Is there still any marked cleavage between the so-called moderates and extremists? Do the extremists exercise a pernicious influence over the younger generation?

Answer: The cleavage between moderates and extremists is complete in this province. At the last Congress a special committee was appointed to try and find a common working programme for both parties. No result has followed on this, so far as these provinces are concerned. The tendency elsewhere in India, the Chief Commissioner believes, seems to be for all except the revolutionaries to come back into the Congress fold. The same will probably happen in the Central Provinces, should politics again come more into fashion.



The corruption of the younger generation used to be the foremost plank in the extremist programme. This was shown by the students' riots in the Hislop College in 1907, the stoning of Mr. Jones, Principal of the Morris College in 1908 and the Sedition discovered in the Agriculture College at the time of the mutilation of the Queen's statue. The Secret Police abstracts are full of the participation of students at extremist meetings, etc. At the present all this has ceased.

Question 26: Has the Press Act had a salutary effect? Is it still being consistently applied?

Answer: There can be no two opinions as to the beneficial effect of the Press Act. A perusal of the writings in the newspapers before and after the passing of the Act shows this at once. There is not now much necessity for applying the Act. The knowledge that the Act is there, is generally a sufficient preventive. The only recent case necessitating the issue of a warning occurred last year, when the "Batamidar" of Yeotmal referred to the Durbar as "Darwada" (an attack by robbers) on two occasions. The paper has since stopped publication. The security of Rs. 5,000 recently taken from the Poona *Kesari* may also be said to affect this province, as this paper has a larger circulation than any other local or otherwise.

Question 26: Are there any Sadhus or other wandering sections in the Central Provinces and is there any reason to suppose that they exercise a maleficent influence?

Answer: The Inspector-General of Police has remarked as follows regarding this matter:—

"Political Sadhus are always a difficult question and little is known of them. Arbindo Ghosh wished to start his Bhowani Mandir in which political Sadhus could be instructed. The educational part of Arbindo Ghosh's programme was to have been kept separate from the active and revolutionary part. V. B. Lele is a type of the political Sadhu and undoubtedly Arbindo and Lele saw alike in this matter. It has never been discovered accurately how far the movement affected these provinces. Sadhu Vishnu Paranjpe seems to have started out with much the same idea (he was connected with V. B. Lele). But this character could not sustain it as his relations with women soon brought him into discredit.

"Besides the Sadhus, we have the inculcation of Nationalism by means of the drama, and of this Patankar's theatrical company is the most prominent example. Kirtan singers are

another agency for creating disaffection, and they have always been very prominent. As usual these signers sing patriotic and religious songs and everywhere consort with extremists."

Question 29: What is the present attitude of the Muhammadan community in the Central Provinces? Is the young Muhammadan Party active there? Do you think there is any likelihood of the combination for political purposes between the Young Muhammadan Party and the Hindu agitators?

Answer: The Chief characteristic among Muhammadans here is apathy. As a community they are loyal. Individually they are keen and anxious for the welfare of their community, but so far they have failed to accomplish much. They have no leaders who are recognised throughout the province. There are a few leaders like Nawab Muhammad Salamullah Khan, C.I.E. of Deoghat, Buldana district, whose influence extends beyond the district in which he resides, otherwise the leaders have only a purely local standing.

The young Moslem Party can hardly be said to be active in these provinces, but there is a branch of the Moslem League, with 13 sub-branches, and if the Young Mohammadan Party captured the League, its influence would no doubt come to be felt in these parts, although the local people might not move with much alacrity at first.

For the present the Muhammadans hold quite aloof from the Hindus, politically, whether they will continue to maintain this attitude depends on the policy of the Moslem League. A possible fusion is obviously a consideration that will always have to be reckoned with. It would probably come slowly in these provinces, unless considerable pressure were exerted in this direction from above.

Question 30: Has the pan-Islamic movement spread among the Muhammadans of the Central Provinces? Have the Turco-Italian War, events in Morocco, and the state of affairs in Persia had any influence on Muhammadans of the Central Provinces?

Answer: The Pan-Islamic movement has not had any effect worth mentioning among the Muhammadans of the Central Provinces. The only signs of stirring amongst the community are the establishment of the Moslem League branches already referred to. But their influence has as yet been slight.

The Turco-Italian War, the events in Morocco and Persia have been noticed in the provinces. There are reports of prayers for

the Turks being said in the mosques and of collections being made for the wounded in Tripoli, but these manifestations appear to be of little moment.

Question 31: It has been suggested that the Muhammadans of India have no real community of interest and are not a homogeneous body. What are your views on the subject as regards the Muhammadans in the Central Provinces? Are they likely to be affected in the event of war with Afghanistan, the Frontier tribes or any outside Muhammadan power?

Answer: The Muhammadans in the Central Provinces may be regarded as a fairly homogeneous body, although as already indicated they have hitherto showed little interest in politics or disposition to combine for racial purposes, and the establishment of the Moslem League has not yet had time to exert much influence. It would largely depend on the attitude of the latter body whether the local community showed much interest in matters such as a war with Afghanistan, etc. Apart from the contingency of pressure being brought to bear through the League, any manifestations of sympathy with outside happenings of this kind would probably be comparatively unimportant. The loyalty of the Muhammadan community would, unless unforeseen developments take place, bear very considerable strain.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WAR AND ITS EFFECTS

1914—1916

When the War broke out in Europe in August 1914 the reaction in India was one of unanimous and enthusiastic support to the cause of the Allies. No doubt India was cast into the War without her consent; she was in it because Great Britain was in it. But it is quite reasonable to presume that even if she had been consulted, her choice would not have been otherwise in the situation then prevailing. The leaders of the extremist wing had, by that time, been disposed of in one way or another. Tilak had just returned to India after six years of banishment in Mandalay; Arabindo Ghosh was seeking consolation in the pursuit of the Spirit in Pondicherry; Lala Lajpatrai was an exile in America; and Bipin Chandra Pal was languishing in prison. The sentiments expressed at the Congress session of December 1914 in Madras reflected the prevailing view. They expressed their gratitude to the King for the Royal Message addressed to the Princes and People of India at the beginning of the War, and their satisfaction at the despatch of the Indian Expeditionary Force to the theatre of War. They then thanked the Viceroy and the Government of India "for affording to the people of India an opportunity of showing that, as equal subjects of His Majesty, they were prepared to fight shoulder to shoulder with the people of other parts of the Empire in defence of right and justice and the cause of the Empire."

The cynic has defined gratitude as a lively expectation of more favours to come. It does not, however, appear that there entered into our calculations at the time any clear idea of reward for services rendered. It was largely a spontaneous reaction, a feeling that the right was on the side of the allies who had gone to save a tiny State of Belgium from the awful might of Kaiser. Mahatma Gandhi called upon the people to offer themselves for recruitment, and Tilak declared that India's place in the War was with Britain. During the first years of the War 800,000 combatant and 400,000 non-combatant men were recruited on a voluntary basis from India. The Government of India contributed something between twenty and thirty million pounds yearly to meet the expenditure of the War, while the people gave generously to the War Loans and Red Cross Fund.

In the Central Provinces the people felt that they had special cause for satisfaction because hardly a fortnight after the War broke out the first meeting of the newly created Legislative Council was held, on 17th August 1914. They met in the Secretariat as the Council building whose foundation stone had been laid by Lord Hardinge the previous year, was not yet ready for occupation. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Benjamin Robertson, presided, and there were about a hundred visitors watching the important session. After impressing on the members of the Council the responsibility which had been placed on them and the importance of the duties they had undertaken, the Chief Commissioner proceeded to refer to the Great War in Europe, and said that though the scene of the War might be far away its effects would surely be felt even here in the Central Provinces. The British had entered the War in defence of vital principles, and he hoped that this province would fully co-operate with England. Coming nearer home, he spoke of the scarcity conditions prevailing in Jabalpur, Damoh and Mandla as a result of the failure of the monsoon, and referred to the irrigation works which were being started in Chhattisgarh. He concluded with an exhortation to the members to enter upon their responsibilities with seriousness and courage, giving them the slogan that the progress and happiness of the people of the Province should be their goal. It was altogether a balanced and impressive inauguration. Madhya Pradesh was experiencing for the first time the doubtful advantages of the Minto-Morley Councils. They had been demanding the establishment of such a Council since 1911. The province certainly had eminent citizens who could well speak for the people in the counsels of Government. Its size and resources justified its being treated on equal terms with the older provinces. Therefore, the inauguration of the Legislative Council was welcomed as a recognition of the claims of the province, as a mark of its having come of age.

Soon after the meeting of the Council, the prominent citizens of the Province were invited to Government House, Nagpur, to assist in the War effort. A Provincial War Relief Fund was established with Sir Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis as Chairman and the Commissioner for Nagpur as Vice-Chairman. Mr. C. E. Low was Secretary. The Muslim population of the province met under the presidentship of Khan Bahadur Malak soon after Turkey had joined the war against Britain, and sent a resolution to the Viceroy expressing the loyalty of the Muslims of the province.

The enthusiasm for the war effort was conspicuous in the Fourth Provincial Conference which met in Nagpur in 1915. It will be recalled that after the third Conference held in 1907 at Raipur the sequence of these sessions had been interrupted owing to the sharp differences in political ideology that cropped up in the Congress. Therefore, at the very beginning of the meeting in 1915 Sir M. B. Dadabhoy moved a resolution that that conference was a continuation of the preceding one held eight years earlier and should be deemed the fourth in the series. It was at first intended to hold the Conference at Amravati but due to an outbreak of plague the venue was shifted to Nagpur and Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukul, who was one of the first batch of members of the Legislative Council, presided. In his address he referred with sorrow to the passing away of two of the foremost leaders of the land, Gopal Krishna Gokhale who died in February 1915 and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta in May 1915. Their removal from the scene marked the end of an Era. They had dominated the political life of the nation for more than three decades, and had established in the national movement a tradition of high idealism, dignified courage and an old-worldly grandeur. But, for some time past they had begun to be out of touch with the rapid currents of public feeling; the country was changing underneath their eyes; familiar landmarks were vanishing from the scenery, and an intensity of feelings alien to the serenity of the Victorian world was stirring up people's hearts. Other valient and patriotic spirits had risen in the country who could steer the movement in the stormy waters ahead: but these two giants—Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta—could quit the deck with the satisfaction that the voyage so far had been piloted bravely and that the future was safe in competent hands.

To come back to the Provincial Conference. The war and India's part in it were naturally ever present in people's minds. Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukul spoke of the sacrifices that India was making in the defence of the British Empire, how the valiant Indian soldiers were proving themselves a match for the best trained troops in Europe, and how India had every justification to feel proud of the gallant achievements of her sons on the field of battle. He expressed the hope—a hope which time had again found expression during the years of the war in all political gatherings—that after victory was gained India would also, like other British colonies, achieve an independent status within the framework of the British Empire. They remembered the words of Prime Minister Asquith that "henceforth Indian questions would have to be approved from a different angle of vision". They quoted the words of Austen

Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India, in his message to the newly commissioned officers of the Indian Civil Service, that "they (the Civil Servants) are going to India at a time when the interest and sympathy of the whole Empire for India had quickened, and when India was feeling her way in the development of those institutions with which we had gifted her". And they recalled a similar address by the Viceroy to the Civil Servants, that "a new role of guide, philosopher and friend is opening before you. and it is worthy of your greatest efforts. Let it be realised that great as has been England's mission in the past, she has a far more glorious task to accomplish in the future in encouraging political development of the people. . . It is to this distant vista that the British official should turn his eyes, and he must grasp the fact that it is by his future success in this direction that the British prestige and efficiency will be judged." Such words as these coming from the British Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and the Viceroy filled the country with hope, and the Provincial Conference held at Nagpur clutched this hope with pathetic faith. The conference dealt with other subjects of Local concern, such as the demand for the establishment of a University at Nagpur, and the reform of Forest administration and Local Self-Government. One interesting recommendation made at this Conference was the establishment of Advisory Boards composed of representatives from Municipalities and District Boards, and some nominees of Government to advise district officers in the administration of the districts, and in matters affecting public good and public security. It was not till after Independence that this idea was put into practice in this State.

While hopes were engendered in the hearts of all Indians about the enlargement of political rights, the tangible fact that became unpleasantly clear was the steel-fisted oppression. In March 1915 the Defence of India Act was passed under which rules were made authorizing the arrest and internment of "dangerous" persons, and trial by Special Tribunals without appeal was introduced. Referring to this Act the Montague-Chelmsford Report says: "It was inevitably a drastic measure: it gave the Governor-General in Council wide rule-making powers with a view to securing the public safety and defence of the country, and also provided for the creation of special tribunals for the quicker trial of certain classes of cases in specially disturbed tracts.....The Bill was naturally rather a severe trial to the Indian elected members; as loyal citizens they supported its principle: but they made no secret of

their aversion to particular provisions and moved many amendments, against which Government used its official majority without hesitation as they would have destroyed the efficacy of the Bill."

No sooner was the Act passed than it was promptly applied in the Punjab and Bengal. In the Punjab the return of the Sikh emigrants, who had been refused entrance into America by the ship **Kamagata Maru**, resulted in some disturbance. Government at once dubbed it a conspiracy and enforced the Defence of India Act. In Bengal the stray cases of violence which continued as a hang-over from the bomb outrages of 1908 to 1910 provided the justification for using the Act. Hundreds of persons, whose guilt was never established according to the needs of normal law were interned. The treatment meted out to them was inhuman. We have a record of the experiences of a political prisoner, although not under the Defence of India Act, who was transferred to Nagpur Jail, and the story of other political sufferers must have been at least equally miserable. Lala Ramcharan was the editor of an Urdu paper in Uttar Pradesh, and had been sentenced to ten years' rigorous imprisonment for a political article he had published. Six years out of the ten he had spent in the Andamans, and when was broke out he was brought to India to go through the remaining portion of his sentence, and he was sent to Nagpur Jail. Here he was charged with violating jail rules because he had refused to work. Leg fetters, bar fetters and hand-cuffs were awarded and on 15th January 1915 he was whipped. In his statement he said that he was a political prisoner, but he had been given the hardest job of polishing paper which caused him intense pain, and because he could not carry on with it he was caned. He was an educated man and was not afraid to do the utmost that lay in his power, but when it was beyond his physical strength what could he do? But his appeals produced no effect, and he got for his pains a further period of six months imprisonment.

While the Government was thus blowing hot and cold, with praise for India's war effort on the one hand and the brutalities of the Defence of India Act on the other, the national forces in the country set about putting their house in order. The two major maladies that afflicted them were the division between the extremists and moderates within the Congress, and the differences between the Muslim League and the Congress. Unless these two divisions are reconciled it was felt that it was not possible for the country to make its claims heard effectively. Tilak had returned home from Mandalay in June 1914; the two great moderate leaders, Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta, were no more on the



scene. It was left to the surviving leaders to undertake the task of reconciliation. It was at this stage that there appeared on the Indian political scene the forceful personality of Mrs. Annie Besant. When the Madras session of the Congress was held in 1914 she had already become a leading figure in public life and took her seat on the Congress platform as a recognised leader. Throughout the year 1915 she carried on a hurricane propaganda for the Home Rule league and hoped that she would be able to draw into it the nationalist extremists, and thus bring them back into line with the moderates into a United Congress. She went to Poona and had long talks with Tilak on this subject. But it was first necessary that the Rule about election of Congress delegate should be amended. She was ultimately able to get an amendment passed whereby associations which had as one of their objects the attainment by constitutional means of Self-Government by India within the Empire, would be entitled to send delegates to the 1916 Congress. The path was thus prepared for the re-entry of the extremists into the Congress.

Meanwhile the other great division between Hindus and Muslims had to be bridged. The Muslim League which had been founded in 1906 with the encouragement and active sympathy of Minto soon found its position somewhat ambiguous when Turkey entered the war on the side of Germany and against Britain. Even earlier, "the war between Italy and Turkey, events in Persia and above all the Balkan war created considerable sympathy with Turkey and resentment at the attitude of the British Government." The reversal of the partition of Bengal and incidents like one at the Cawnpore mosque where a crowd of Muslims was fired upon by the police dispirited the Muslim community. The younger section in the Muslim League, dissatisfied with the subservient role which it was playing urged a more patriotic policy. In 1913 Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a staunch Congressman at the time, was persuaded to join the League when the League constitution was changed to promote national unity by fostering public spirit among the people of India and by co-operating with other communities for this purpose. The 1913 session of the League went to the extent of adopting the ideal of the "attainment under the aegis of the British Crown of a system of Self-Government suitable to India". Jinnah joined the League on the express condition that he would secede from it if its policy was in conflict either with the Congress or with the larger interests of India. Thus it happened that during the years of the war the League began to speak a language different from that of 1906, and one of the veteran leader

of the League went so far as to say: "The time has come when young men have begun to realise that the real honour is the one which the people of the country confer and not one which the Government bestows."

In 1915 both the Congress and the League held their sessions in Bombay at about the same time. Lord Sinha presided over the Congress, while Mazhar-ul-Haq, an old Congressman, presided over the League. And it so happened that the address of the League President was stronger and more fervid than that of the President of the Congress, which made Maulana Mohammed Ali remark humorously that "by an irony of fate the League President read to an audience of Muslims the pungent oration of a Bengalee, while Sinha read to the Congress delegates the cautious address of a 'Loyal' Muslim." The ground had been prepared at this session for a coming together of the Congress and the League.

Mrs. Besant came to Nagpur on 13th October 1915, and stayed with Sir Bipin Krishna Bose. She expounded to the Nagpur public her scheme for establishing the Home Rule League at a public meeting which was attended by Tilak, Dadasahab Khaparde and other political leaders. There was general support for the principles explained by her, and on her return to Madras the Home Rule League was established on 22nd April 1916. Lokmanya Tilak and his supporters in Poona were joined by delegates from the Central Provinces headed by Khaparde in their support for Home Rule whose object was the attainment of Swaraj by all constitutional means within the framework of the British Empire. A Provincial Association was formed in 1916 with Dr. Hari Singh Gour as President and Dr. Munje as Secretary, and members representing every district of the State. Among members from the Chhattisgarh Division were Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, Rai Bahadur Chaudhari and Rai Sahab Dani from Raipur. The Provincial Association had its headquarters at Nagpur with branches all over the province.

The war was dragging on with no hope of a speedy victory. The Mesopotamia Campaign, planned and executed by the Government of India, ended in a costly fiasco. The Indian troops went through untold suffering, and besieged by Turkey at the fort of Kurt they had to make a disastrous surrender. Asquith had to resign and was succeeded by a Coalition Government under Lloyd George; Sir Austen Chamberlain succeeded Lord Crewe as Secretary of State for India; and Lord Chelmsford succeeded Lord Hardings as Viceroy in April 1916. It was partly for the benefit of the incoming Viceroy that nineteen elected members of the

Imperial Legislative Council drew up a Memorandum on post-war reforms for India. It was in the nature of the minimum demands of India so that the new Viceroy may not be ignorant of the wishes of the people. Among its signatories were Shrinivasa Sastri, Surendranath Banerjee, Ibrahim Rahimatullah and M. A. Jinnah. The Memorandum stated that "what is wanted is not merely good Government or efficient administration, but a Government acceptable to the people, because responsible to them. This is what India understands would constitute a new angle of vision. If after the War the position of India remains practically what it was before, the beneficent effects of participation in common danger overcome by common effort will leave nothing behind, save the painful memory of unrealized expectations." This Memorandum became a few months later the basis for the Resolution adopted by the Congress and the Moslem League.

Meanwhile Moslem opinion in India had become distinctly suspicious of Britain. In 1916 the Sharif of Mecca rebelled against his overlord, the Khalif who, it will be remembered, was in the war against Britain. Thus in the eyes of the Moslems the Sharif of Mecca had made himself a pawn in the game of England, and the Holy place was in danger. Maulana Mohamad Ali had already been interned in 1915 under the Defence of India Act, because of his sympathy with Turkey's cause. Thus when the Lucknow session of the League and the Congress assembled in December 1916 the mood of both the bodies was one of unanimous dissatisfaction with British policy and a desire for joint action. The Congress met in a thrilling atmosphere. For the first time after the Surat debacle the extremists came again to the Congress. On the dais were seated Tilak and Gandhi, Mrs. Besant and Surendranath Banerjee. Dadasaheb Khaparde and Motilal Nehru, Mohamad Ali Jinnah and Rash Behari Ghosh, Mazharul Haq and the Maharajah of Mahmudabad. There was great enthusiasm born of the joy of reunion. The chief resolution stated the demand for Swaraj. It was a Resolution that was based on the scheme which a Joint Committee of the Congress and Moslem League set up in 1915, had prepared. The scheme itself took for its basis the Memorandum of the nineteen members of the Imperial Council. Surendranath Banerjee moving the Resolution urged Britain to fix a time limit for the grant of Swaraj, and emphasised that during the period of the war the claims of the Congress and the League should be recognised, and in the future set-up of the Empire of India should be given the same position as the other component members. The Muslim League which met at the same time also adopted the same

Resolution. The agreement which was arrived at between these two bodies, known as the Lucknow Pact formulated a scheme of reforms under which while the Moslems agreed to the goal of Swaraj the Hindus accepted the communal electorates for Moslems. The percentage of Muslim representation was fixed for each Provincial legislature, and in the Central Legislative Assembly one-third of the seats were set apart for Muslims. Both the Congress and the League ratified this scheme, and thus by the end of 1916 political India presented a united front to Great Britain, with a demand, concrete and comprehensive.

But the mood of Great Britain had undergone a change. Reaction was in the air. There were in Bengal at that time as many as 479 young persons in detention, and more than sixty had been victims of Regulation 3 of the Defence of India Act. Then came the Report of the Mesopotamia Commission appointed by the British Parliament in 1916 to enquire into the disastrous failure of the 1915 campaign. It was a thorough condemnation of the India Government's military administration. It not only found fault with the war-time organisation, but even the peace-time provisions for medical aid of the Indian Sepoys were described as a disgrace to the Government. One of the members of the Commission, Mr. Wedgwood said, among other things, in his minority report: "My last recommendation is that we should no longer deny to Indians the full privileges of citizenship, but should allow them a large share in the Government of their own country and in the control of that bureaucracy which in this war, uncontrolled by public opinion, has failed to rise to British standards." India would have been content if the bureaucracy had risen at least to elementary human standards—let alone "British" standards. But they pursued a path of callous indifference to people's sentiments and a contempt for the dignity of man if he is an Indian. By the time the year 1917 was well advanced India was once again thrown into an exasperated and disillusioned mood. All the good-will and enthusiasm which had filled the country at the time the war broke out had been turned into gall and wormwood.

Before describing the sequel to this turning of the tide, a brief reference should be made to the Provincial Association held in 1916. It met at Amravati and devoted a considerable part of its business to matters relating to the State. It asked for Municipal Committees in all towns with a population of 5,000 and more, with three-fourths of the members including the President being elected. Similarly, they demanded that the District Councils should be administered through the representatives of the people

and not by officials, and larger powers should be vested in the Councils. Another significant demand was that Gram Panchayats should be established all over the province and they should be entrusted with all matters relating to public health, water-supply, roads, schools, forests, markets, as also small civil cases and minor criminal work. The conference revealed a commendable awareness of some of the fundamental aspects of administration the validity of most of which has been tested since freedom came.

Towards the end of 1916 Mr. Polak, the well-known authority of the South African question and a friend of India, visited Nagpur and helped to focus public attention on the subject of indentured labour which was becoming a scandal in several British colonies. At a meeting held on 13th December he drew a painful and pathetic picture of the condition of the coolies in foreign countries and asserted that this evil must be stopped. A resolution was passed calling upon the British Government to prohibit immediately the recruitment of indentured labour which was disastrous to the moral well-being of the emigrants and humiliating to the country.

The Mesopotamia Commission Report had an immediate effect on the British Government. The Report was published in May 1917. In July 1917, Sir Austen Chamberlain resigned the office of Secretary of State for India. But before he left office he tried to make amends for all his lapses by two measures. He agreed to abolish the emigration of indentured labour to Fiji, and he removed an old grievance by raising the import duty on cotton goods to  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent, but allowing the excise duty to remain at the old level of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Thus for the first time in history the Government of India was bold enough to levy a duty which had a protective effect against Lancashire imports. Perhaps it was only meant as a sop to India in order to make her contribute to the hundred million sterling War Loan which the Budget of 1917 announced. The war dragged on through weary months: Germany fought with brutal desperation, and America which had kept out of it for three years had to plunge in.

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## CHAPTER IX

### TURNING TIDES

1917—1919

Between October 1916 and August 1917 there was a turning of the tide in Indo-British relations. By a succession of unimaginative acts of Chelmsford, Indian political opinion had been thoroughly roused. The expression of even innocuous public opinion was stifled by the use of the Press Act. The 'Maharashtra' of Nagpur was asked to deposit a second security of Rs. 1,500—as its first security had been forfeited for certain articles regarding the treatment of indentured labour. The exactions for meeting the mounting war expenditure and the methods used for increased recruitment became oppressive as the war dragged on. Prices began to rise steeply and the unbalanced economy hit the vast masses while a few unscrupulous men profited. India was conscious of a new unity and strength after the Lucknow Conference and grew impatient of the rapidly deteriorating conditions in the country which they could do nothing to arrest.

Soon after the Congress Session of 1916, the Home Rule agitation led by Tilak and Mrs. Besant gathered momentum. On the banks of the Hoogli on 3rd January 1917 they proclaimed their demand. Tilak arrived in Nagpur direct from Calcutta on 5th January. There was a large public meeting on the next day at which the Lokmanya appealed to the people to press for the establishment of Home Rule. Branches were established in many places, and by April there were over 1,500 members. The Government reacted in the usual blind manner. The Punjab Government passed an order prohibiting the entry of Lokmanya Tilak into that province. Madras Government arrested Mrs. Besant and two of her colleagues under section 3 of the Defence of India Act. The result, as was to be expected, was to make the Home Rule Movement immensely more popular. Practically all the prominent leaders in the country joined the movement. In Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Hari Singh Gour, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao, Shri S. B. Tambe and many others joined it. The Ali Brothers, who had been detained in Chhindwara, also joined the movement. The student population was caught up by the wave of national sentiment, and in spite of the admonitions of the officials of the Education Department they joined in the demonstrations and public meetings,

with the result that a number of them in Nagpur, Wardha, Yeotmal and Amravati were expelled from their schools. When Tilak visited Jabalpur he was given a rousing reception by the students and the public. He was taken in procession and a mass meeting was held at Bhaldarpura with Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukul as President. A fiat had gone round the colleges ordering students not to attend the meeting; but they were present in their thousands.

There had been some revolutionary outrages in Bengal attributed to the Anushilan Samiti, and acting on some suspicion the police carried out searches in Jabalpur and arrested Shailendra Ghosh and four others and kept them in detention for various periods. Shailendra Ghosh was the son of a pleader of Seoni and a teacher. With him was arrested Shivprasad Verma a pleader, Prafullakumar Chakravarti, a clerk in Jabalpur, Devicharan Singh, who suffered from tuberculosis and died soon after his release in 1918. On his death the following verses composed by him were found with his belongings:—

अर्ज मृतलक न सुनी और न सुना ददें जिगर ।

हक से फरियाद करूंगा, मैं बरोजे महशर ॥

तलफिये हक की गरीबों के सजा पावोगे ।

आज बेकस हैं, पर उस रोज कहां जावोगे ॥

It was against this background that the new Secretary of State for India Mr. Montagu took office in July 1917, and on 20th August 1917 made the well-known statement in the House of Commons defining the object of British rule in India: "the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire". We are told that the drafting was Curzon's; if so, he had certainly lost something of the sweep and swagger that characterised his phrases when he occupied the Viceregal *gadi*. Nevertheless, in spite of the excessively guarded qualifications in "gradual development" and "progressive realization", if a declaration of this nature had come while India was on the crest of her enthusiasm for war effort the people would have welcomed it and continued to put their faith in the rulers. But that moment had long past. Official suspicion had shaken their faith; persecution had embittered their soul; delay and disappointment had hardened their hearts.

When a special session of the Provincial Political Conference met at Raipur on 26th August 1917, the subject that occupied their attention was not the Secretary of State's declaration made six days ago, but the repressive policy of Government. Shri Morropant Dixit moved and Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla seconded the main Resolution which said:—

“We desire to record our strong protest against the action of the Madras Government in interning Mrs. Besant, Mr. Arundale and Mr. Wadia under the Defence of India Act, inasmuch as the said Act, according to its spirit and authoritative declarations made on behalf of Government with respect to it, was never meant to apply to a constitutional propaganda for reform of Government.”

Dr. Hari Singh Gour, who presided, referred to the great crisis through which the country was passing resulting in a talk of satyagraha in the country as even the most moderate of moderates had become tired of the repressive policy of Government. He went on to say, “We cannot continue to suffer these conditions silently. We have got to reply to the repressive policy of Government. Government ought to realise that such a policy will inflame public opinion and it will be difficult to extinguish the flames later on”. The Conference did in a formal way welcome the declaration made in the British Parliament, but added that they should first withdraw the policy of repression.

Montague was not as impervious as his predecessors in office. He seemed to have a genuine love for India. He certainly strove harder than any Secretary of State before him, and also most of those who followed him, for promoting cordial relations between Britain and India. It is said that the whitling down of the 1919 Reforms Act, was felt by him as a betrayal of India, and he died soon after in 1924, at the comparatively young age of forty-five. His actions soon after making the declaration of 20th August certainly made it appear that he was in earnest. In September he ordered the release of Mrs. Besant and her colleagues; and he followed it up with the announcement that he was personally visiting India—as act without precedent for a Secretary of State—so that in consultation with Indian leaders and the officials on the spot he might work out a scheme of Reforms embodying the principles of the declaration.

But the position was by no means simple. Mr. Montague soon found that he had to fight a battle on two fronts, on the one side a Parliament which was just then too preoccupied with the threatening advance to the West of the German army to pay any serious attention to the question of Reforms in India: and



the other side a wooden and unimaginative Bureaucracy from the Viceroy downwards who believed in "no nonsense about reform" and felt that they knew how to deal with trouble-makers. "I wish I could get the damned Bureacracy to realize that we are sitting on an earthquake", wrote Montague in his *Diary*. There was, of course, a third front he had to battle with, the distrust and opposition from the Indian leaders who had been so long fed on false hopes that they had ceased to believe that Britain could ever do the right thing. The popular feeling was reflected in the Calcutta Session of the Congress held in December 1917. It was an important session because from now on the Congress policy was guided by those who had been called extremists. The session was presided over by Mrs. Besant who had been recently released from internment. Besides, there were Lokmanya Tilak, Lala Lajpatrai, who had returned from his exile, and C. R. Das, the idol of the younger generation. Earlier Tilak and Mrs. Besant had met Mr. Montague in Delhi and had invited him to attend the Congress Session. But the very idea shocked officialdom. "I wished to dash down to the Congress and make them a great oration; it might save the whole situation. But I am prevented from doing so", he writes sadly.

A few days before the Congress met, Government announced the appointment of a Committee with Mr. Justice Rowlatt, a Judge of the King's Bench in England as Chairman for the purpose of enquiring into criminal conspiracies in India and to report on how far and to what extent the revolutionary associations had spread in the country, to find out the difficulties encountered by Government in prosecuting them and to advise what legislation, if any, should be undertaken to deal with them. This Committee was appointed on 10th December 1917. One could well ask why this was at all necessary. Did not Government have in its possession all the law that was required, and more, to deal with any kind of suspected, prospective or imaginary crime? The Defence of India Act, the Press Act, the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act and the time-worn 1818 Regulations? Actually when the Sedition Act based on Rowlatt Report was passed in due course, it was not used in a single case.

The only purpose that the appointment of the committee served was to provoke and exasperate the people. They saw in it the beginning of another era of repression. It was as if Government wished to forestall any feeling of exultation among the people as a result of the Parliamentary Declaration of 20th

August. It was a warning that more diabolical weapons were being sharpened for the chastisement of the so-called sedition-mongers. Once again the bureaucracy had successfully queered the pitch for any peaceful progress. The Calcutta Congress condemned the appointment of the Rowlatt Committee in strong terms, and demanded the release of the Ali Brothers who had been long languishing in the jails of Madhya Pradesh. The mood of the Congress in this session was distinctly assertive. The moderates found themselves out of their depths. As one of them has stated, "for many of us who could not be persuaded to believe in the efficacy of the tactics of the new gossellers the Congress of 1917 held at Calcutta under the presidency of Mrs. Besant was ominous as showing that it might be our last Congress. And so it turned out to be". (Chintamani : Indian Politics Since Mutiny).

On his way back from the Calcutta Session, Lokmanya Tilak undertook an extensive tour of Madhya Pradesh. At Khandwa he was given an enthusiastic reception on 6th February 1918, and he spoke briefly in Hindi, a verbatim report of which has survived. It is a good example of his simple and direct appeal to the minds of the people :—

“आज कल का दिन स्वराज्य का है. १० बरसों के आगल ऐसा था, कि मुंह से स्वराज्य निकालने वाले को सजा होती थी. आज वह समय नहीं है. वह फरक कैसा हो गया ? फरक होने का क्या कारण है ? युरप में जो महायुद्ध चल रहा है, वही इसका कारण है. साम्राज्य की उन्नति हिन्दुस्थान के उन्नति पर ही निर्भर है. यह बात विलायत के अंग्रेज अच्छी तरह जानते हैं. आज १०० बरस हो चुके हैं. सभी बड़े अफसर यहां विलायत हो आते हैं. हिन्दुस्थान में १०-५ करोड सैनिक भी महायुद्ध के समय नहीं मिल सके. तीस करोड जनसंख्या में से ५ लाख सैनिक क्यों मिले ? इसका कारण यही है कि देश नामदं बना दिया गया है. आज हमारी तलवार नांगर बन गई है. फिर से तलवार बनाने में समय लगेगा. भारत में सांप्रत तो स्मशानवत शांतता है. ऐसी शांति हमें नहीं चाहिये. लोगों पर विश्वास रखना, यही तो स्वराज्य का अर्थ है. मि. मोटेगु स्वराज्य की चर्चा के लिये आये हैं. किंतु उसका निर्णय पार्लमेंट करेगी. इसी कारण से हम विलायत में जाकर वहां के लोगों को अनुकूल करना चाहते हैं. अभी हमारे लीग के अध्यक्ष बाप्टिस्टा हो गये हैं. वहां की मजदूर पार्टी ने सहायता देने का अभिवचन दिया है. एक आदमी के कार्य से जब यह कार्य हुआ है, और यदि १०-५ आदमी वहां जाय, तो एक वर्ष में स्वराज्य क्यों नहीं मिलेगा ? संसार में प्रजातंत्र शासन स्थापित करना यही तो महायुद्ध का हेतु है. उस हेतु के लिये १०-५ नेताओं ने विलायत में भी आंदोलन करना चाहिये. मैं आप लोगों से कहना चाहता हूं कि आप हमारे कार्य में योगदान दें.”

He covered a number of places in Nagpur and Berar Divisions, speaking about the objects of Swaraj Sangh (Home Rule). At the end of his tour the purses presented to him for the Swaraj Fund amounted to Rs. 1,10,000.

All through the months of 1918 the tension between Government and the political leaders of India grew. Early in 1918 Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal were prohibited from entering Delhi and the Punjab. The Punjab Government was panicky about the outbreak of an organised rebellion. This state of panic perhaps explains—though it can never excuse—some of the inhuman brutalities committed by that Government later. Protest meetings were held at Nagpur, Wardha, Jabalpur and Raipur condemning the misuse of the Defence of India Act in banning leaders like Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal. The meeting at Raipur was very largely attended because a number of persons from the whole province had gathered for the ensuing Provincial Conference. Shri C. M. Thakkar presided. The protest resolution was moved by Wamanrao Lakhe and supported by Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla. Interest was added to this question because only a few weeks earlier, on 20th February, Bipin Chandra Pal had visited Madhya Pradesh. In a lecture delivered at Nagpur he had described in moving terms the condition prevailing in the country, asserting that India had every right to an equal status with the rest of the Empire. It had been proposed to send a deputation to England, and B. C. Pal, N. C. Kelkar and Dadasaheb Khaparde were to have joined it at Colombo on 5th April 1918, but under orders of the War Council in England they were not permitted to sail. The resentment caused by this high-handed act found expression in the Sixth Provincial Conference held at Raipur on 30th and 31st March 1918. They resolved that so long as Government was not prepared to grant Swaraj it would be difficult to co-operate in the War effort. The conference was unusually well attended, and the success of its organisation was largely due to Rai Bahadur Chaudhri, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, Madhavrao Sapre and Wamanrao Lakhe.

During these months Mr. Montagu was touring the provinces of India, meeting officials and leaders of public opinion, gathering personal impressions of the problems and needs of the country. His *Indian Diary* gives a candid record of these experiences, and it is clear that the leaders who counted with the public life of the country had all unanimously placed the Congress-League point of view before him. The Madhya Pradesh delegation that met him included Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukul, Dadasaheb Khaparde, R. N. Mudholkar, Dr. Hari Singh Gour, Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis, Sir Moropant Joshi and C. M. Thakkar.

The District Political Conferences became a regular feature in these years and helped to spread political awakening in rural areas. These conferences were held at Chhindwara, Balaghat, Amravati.

Chanda, Damoh and Sagar. These meetings, together with the annual Provincial Conferences held at different places by turns, served to educate and energise the people and hastened the transformation of the political struggle from a middle class movement to a mass movement. As the war situation worsened efforts were furiously made to stimulate the war effort in the country. The Viceroy called a War meeting in Delhi, and in Nagpur an impressive Durbar was held on 4th May 1918 in the newly constructed Legislative Council building. Several loyalist gathered at the Durbar and promised Government their co-operation. But the voice of the people was heard elsewhere at a number of talhsil meetings where resolutions demanding Swaraj and National education were passed. One such meeting was held at Wardha, another at Yeotmal on 5th May, a third at Dhamtari on 17th and 18th May. These voices were not then heard in the pompous Durbars; but a time was to come when they would be heard, loud and clear, as the Voice of Destiny.

The steam-roller of prosecutions under the various unjust laws rumbled along gathering the innocent and the long suffering under it. One Bhaiyalal Chaudhari of Damoh was prosecuted under Sections 23, 25 and 29 of the Defence of India Act; they tried hard to bolster up a case, but they failed and the case had to be withdrawn. But they were more persistent with Shri Narayan Rao Vaidya. They hauled him under Sections 23 and 29 of the Defence of India Act, and also under 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. His only crime was that he had criticised the revenue assessment, and had protested against recruitment to the labour corps instead of as soldiers. "We are prepared to fight and die; but do not want to be coolies", he had said. This case created quite a sensation. It commenced on 1st August 1918, and in the lower court Narayan Rao Vaidya was sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment. He went on appeal to the Judicial Commissioner, and C. R. Das argued his case for three days. On 19th November Vaidya was acquitted. These are only some of the instances of harassment to which nationalists were subjected. No wonder the mood of the people was none too friendly by the time the Montagu-Chelmsford Report was published.

For six months, from November 1917 to May 1918, Montagu worked hard and patiently in India. It was not enough to gather his facts, but to put them in a form and make his recommendations in a manner that would commend themselves to Chelmsford and the Bureaucracy on the one hand, to the War Cabinet in England and, if possible, largest possible number of Indians on the

other. After a good deal of changing and chopping Lord Chelmsford and Montagu were able to bring themselves to sign a Joint Report, and it was presented to the British Parliament in July 1918. Any attempt to please everyone proverbially ends up in pleasing none. So it was with the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. The reaction of the politically conscious section of Madhya Pradesh was made clear at a special session of the Provincial Conference held at Akola on 11th August with B. G. Horniman as President. During the course of discussions it became clear that there was a difference of opinion, the elder group being inclined to look with favour at the Report. But that group was in a minority, and the resolutions adopted by the Conference were on these points:—

- (1) This Conference is not prepared to go back on the scheme presented by the Congress and Muslim League and reiterates its support to that scheme.
- (2) That this Report does not fulfil the hopes raised by the declaration of the 20th August and that it throws doubt on the capacity of Indians for Self-Government.
- (3) That though a Central Assembly and a Council of State are to be established at the Centre, the Central Government will still remain in absolute control and the Provincial Governments were not fully free.
- (4) That though some departments were proposed to be under public representatives, there is a provision for their being taken back. For these reasons the proposals in the Report cannot be considered to be the first step towards Swaraj; that the control of administration will remain in the hands of Government and that the representatives of the people will really be without power and that the proposals fail to come up to the hopes and aspirations of the Indian people.
- (5) That the entire financial control under the excuse of good government and administration and safety will be in the hands of the Central and Provincial Governments only which is full of danger.
- (6) That Dyarchy as proposed therein was full of many difficulties, and that the proposals require to be suitably amended.

The Conference offered a number of suggestions for making the Report more acceptable, and also passed a few formal resolutions. The Indian National Congress also decided to hold a special

sitting to consider the Report, and met at Bombay on 29th August 1918. Hasan Imam presided and Vitthalbhai Patel was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The Congress considered the Montagu proposals disappointing and went on to suggest some modifications which were absolutely necessary to make the recommendations a substantial step towards responsible government. They also decided to send a deputation to England to place their point of view before the Select Committee. The Muslim League also met at the same time and adopted resolutions practically on the same lines as the Congress. The political unity was still maintained.

The moderates watched this sorry fate of Montagu Report with considerable apprehension. They saw that the bureaucracy was also opposed to it because it conceded too much. They, therefore, decided to take a positive lead, go to London, if necessary, to influence the Parliamentary Committee, and save the whole thing from impending wreck. The Moderates did not, therefore, attend the special session of the Congress at Bombay. They met in Bombay separately later, in November, and formed themselves into another organisation, the Indian National Liberal Federation.

While these developments were taking place in regard to constitutional reforms, the Report of the Rowlatt Committee was published in the summer of 1918, close on the heels of the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. The gods could not have chosen a juxtaposition more ironical. With one hand were proffered vague and half-hearted concessions which might mean nothing, while the other hand held out the mailed fist of repression, about which there was nothing vague or mistakable. The Rowlatt Committee fulfilled the worst fears that had been entertained by the people. It could hardly carry out any original investigations, and relied almost wholly on the secret reports compiled by the Criminal Investigation Departments of the different provinces. It found nothing new, and yet recommended special trials without jury for political cases in notified areas and powers of internment to Provincial Governments. It was clear that Government was bent upon assuming extraordinary powers for putting down any kind of political agitation.

The Congress session that met at Delhi on 25th December 1918 was presided over by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya who had recently resigned from the Imperial Legislative Council on the issue of the Rowlatt Bill. His exhortation in his Presidential address set the note for the deliberations of the Congress: "You

have asked that the British Government should extend the principle of self-determination to India in her political reconstruction. I ask you to determine that hence forward, you shall be equal fellow-subjects of your British fellow-subjects and equals of all the rest of your fellowmen in the world. I ask you to determine that hereafter you will resent and resent most strongly any effort to treat you as an inferior people. I ask you to determine that hence forward you will claim, and claim with all the strength that you command, that in your own country you shall have opportunities to grow as freely as Englishmen grow in the United Kingdom. If you will exercise this much of self-determination and go about inculcating these principles of equality, of liberty and fraternity among your people, if you will make every brother, however humble or lowly placed he may be, to feel that the ray Divine is as much in him as in any other man, however highly placed he may be: if you will make every brother realise that he is entitled to be treated as an equal fellow subject you will have determined your future for yourself."

The resolutions passed at this session were, however, restrained in tone. One of them stated that the Report of the Rowlatt Committee would adversely effect the working of constitutional reforms, while another asked for the release of Ali Brothers. The War had ended in the meanwhile and a Peace Conference was to be held at Versailles. The Congress demanded that India should be represented at the Peace Conference by the elected representatives of the people and nominated Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Hasan Imam as representatives. A deputation was also to be sent to England to present India's case.

India was at this time swept by an epidemic form of influenza which took a heavy toll of lives and added to the distress that followed the cessation of the War. It was estimated that the number of casualties in Madhya Pradesh amounted to about five per cent. In the whole of India some twelve to thirteen million were reckoned to have died. It was almost like another war on the home front. To make matters worse there was a failure of the harvest in 1918 and a sharp rise in prices. Thus the Armistice, which brought peace to Europe, brought no peace to India. It was in the midst of all this distress that the drastic provisions of the Rowlatt Bill were placed before the Imperial Legislative Council at Delhi. Among other things the Bill armed the police with almost unlimited powers to search the house of any person, and naturally filled all people with alarm. As in the rest of the country, protest meetings were held in practically every town in Madhya Pradesh.

The District Conferences at Chanda, Chhindwara, Wardha, Saoner passed strong resolutions of protest. A mass meeting was held at Hoshangabad to protest against it. At Nagpur a public meeting was called on 10th February 1919 at which C. R. Das spoke in scathing terms about the oppressive nature of the Bill. All the elected members of the Legislative Council in Madhya Pradesh signed a public declaration opposing it. But in the face of such a country-wide protest, in defiance of the vehement opposition by the non-official Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council, among whom were some of India's tallest men—Pandit Malaviya, V. J. Patel, Sapru, Sastry, Asaf Ali, Mohamad Shafi, not to speak of the representatives from Madhya Pradesh, Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis, Dadasaheb Khaparde and Vishnu Dutt Shukul—inspite of such an unprecedented unanimity of disapproval, the Rowlatt Bill became an Act.

The expeditious manner in which this legislation was rushed through was in striking contrast to the leisurely, almost deliberately obstructive manner, in which the Reform Bill was handled. The slow process of preparing a Bill embodying the suggestions in the Montagu-Chelmsford Report began in none too great a hurry. Thereafter a franchise and functions committee visited India in the winter of 1918-1919. It contained three Europeans and three Indians, among whom were Sir Frank Sly and Sir Malcolm Hailey, Rt. Hon'ble Sastry and Sir Surendranath Banerjea. They toured the country and also visited Nagpur where they co-opted Diwan Bahadur S. C. Dube in so far as the work relating to this province was concerned. Among those who gave evidence, strongly criticising the proposals, was Shri Madhavrao Aney. At long last a Bill was framed, and a Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament sat over it in the summer of 1919. Some modifications were again made, and finally in December 1919 it became law, about twenty months after Montagu had submitted his Report.

And what exactly did this Act create? It was to be expected that a Constitution conceived with such labour and brought forth with so much effort would take some monstrous shape. And so it did. It gave to the world a thing called Dyarchy which has been described by some one as a method of propulsion in which you hand over the steering-wheel but retain control of the accelerator, the gear-lever and the brake. No doubt it added a few more seats to the Provincial and the Central Legislatures, appointed a few more decorative Indian members on the Executive Councils of the Governors and the Viceroy; and transferred a few innocuous subjects into the hands of the Indian members, while taking good



care that adequate safeguards and over-riding powers were placed in the hands of the Viceroy to keep the Indian members out of mischief.

The Rowlatt Act was passed on 1st March 1919 ; the Reforms Act was passed in December 1919. Between these two dates intervened massacre, tyranny, riots and terror. The hands of some of those who sat down at the Peace Table at Versailles were wet with the blood of innocents shed in the lanes of Amritsar and on the plains of Gujranwala. And in the mean while there had arisen a man in India who was far better fitted to preside over the Peace of the World but whom Destiny had called to oppose with his frail frame the frightfulness of British tyranny in India.

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## CHAPTER X

### THE PLUNGE—ADVENT OF GANDHI

An iniquitous law, an unheeding and determined authority, a helpless but protesting people who only ask for justice—there you have all the circumstances that call for Satyagraha. Gandhiji had implored the Viceroy from his sick-bed not to give his assent to the Rowlatt Bills, but that had gone unheeded. Therefore, on 24th February, Gandhiji declared that if these Bills became law, he would start Satyagraha. It was against an unjust law that years before on September 11, 1906, Gandhiji had for the first time taken the Satyagraha Pledge at Johannesburg. On his coming back to India he had practised it with success at least on two occasions, at Champaran and at Kheda. But those were comparatively local issues: here, on the other hand, was a matter of vital principle of wider significance. The Viceroy invited him to Delhi to talk the matter over with him: he went, but nothing resulted from it. A meeting was held at Delhi presided over by Dr. Ansari where Gandhiji announced his decision to resort to Satyagraha. Fifteen leaders took the pledge with him, among whom were Dr. Ansari, Swami Shradhanand and Hasrat Mohani. From Delhi, Gandhiji accompanied Pandit Motilal Nehru to Allahabad. The future Prime Minister of free India was thrilled at the idea of Satyagraha and longed to join: but he says how his father had long talks about it with Gandhiji and “as a result, Gandhiji advised me not to precipitate matters or to do anything which might upset father”.

The proposal for Satyagraha found widespread support throughout Madhya Pradesh. The 20th March had been appointed for a country-wide hartal, and it was observed with remarkable success in this State. Other places observed it on different dates. Delhi closed all shops on 30th March and made it an occasion for cordial fraternisation between Hindus and Muslims. In other places the 6th April had been fixed as Satyagraha Day. Trouble broke out in a number of places—Ahmedabad, Delhi, Amritsar, Gujranwala, and Kasur. Then came the horror of Jallianwala Bagh on 13th April, where in a completely enclosed square, General Dyer fired 1,600 rounds of ammunition on a packed crowd of men, women and children, killing 400 and severely wounding 1,200. It was a terrible massacre which filled the whole country with anger and horror. It is not necessary to go into the details of the tragedy, nor the more inhuman orders of vindictiveness that were passed

by the General in the city. What he himself had to say about it may be quoted, to indicate the heartless and calculated way in which he perpetrated the crime:

"I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce. . . .!"

The British were generally a little uncomfortable at this rather bare-faced way of defending it. Some diehards, no doubt, congratulated the gallant General. But *The Nation*, a sober weekly in England, wrote:

"We shall show ourselves as a nation unfit to rule if we pass this thing over lightly. To condone it, to minimise it is to court its repetition. . . . The British Empire will not survive many Amritsar massacres."

One of the by-products of this tragedy was the virtual exit of Mrs. Besant from the political stage of India. She had openly opposed the Satyagraha, and when the massacre resulted, she perhaps irresistibly took up the attitude of "I-told-you-so". Indeed when political activity changed from platform oratory to facing musketry, several erstwhile leaders dropped away.

The horror of Amritsar shocked Madhya Pradesh profoundly. On 19th April 1919, the Provincial Conference met at Khandwa, and all the main speakers, Dr. Raghavendra Rao, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla and others strongly condemned the outrage. In the light of events Mahatma Gandhi himself issued a statement on 21st July suspending the Satyagraha movement. While the country was in this mood, the Government of India decided to hold country-wide celebrations from the 16th to 19th December to mark the victory of the Allies in the European War. In Madhya Pradesh too the Government proceeded to make elaborate arrangements for the celebration which, in view of the public feeling, can only be described as grossly callous. The Provincial Congress Committee in this State did not take it lying down, but issued a statement signed by fifty members, which was a dignified and devastating reply to Government and deserves quoting:

"The Great World-wide European War, with all its attendant horrors and destructions is over, after a deadly struggle of more than four years, in which millions of the finest youths of the world have been killed or disabled for ever, and money has been spent like water.

The world, for its part, on the faith of the high declarations of the statesmen of England and her Allies, has borne its ordeals with fortitude and patience, buoyed up with the hope, as was held out to it, that, if once the formidable German militarism is annihilated, the world will be free to evolve a better order of existence for its varied races and communities, on the principle of self-determination, to be made applicable to all, irrespective of their race or colour; and that the exploitation and subjugation of the weaker by the strong nation, giving rise to perpetual rancour and war between man and man, will thus be buried in the victory that should be won. But what do we actually see today in the British Empire? Far from peace and contentment, flowing from the just principle of 'Live and let live', there is the bitterest racial animosity prevailing everywhere, as for instance, in Ireland, Egypt, South Africa and India.

Though India has contributed immensely both in men and money for winning this victory, yet today her position in the world and the British Empire remains as miserable as before. At first, when England's implacable foe was brought to his knees, suing for Armistice, India had dared justly to feel, inspired by the declarations of gratitude for India's unstinted help in England's hour of trial, that at least the bloodshed in chivalrous Comradeship with England will wash away the sins which made India a dependent nation, and that at the earliest opportunity of freedom from the immediate concerns of the war, she will get her rightful place. But it has all proved a mere dream. While semi-barbarous people of the Trans-Caucasia and the Yugoslavs and a host of others who were only yesterday the bitterest enemies of England are now being freely encouraged to claim self-determination, India, the inheritor of the world-old civilization, is being told to her face that the principle of self-determination will not be applied to her. Not only this, but a bitter lesson of humiliation has been taught to India, in Punjab, as if to bring her round to a proper sense of her actual position and status in the Empire. The Rowlatt Bills, otherwise known as the Black Bills, have been hurriedly introduced, soon after the Armistice was signed, and passed in utter defiance of the unanimous opposition of the people. When they began the traditional constitutional agitation to get that hated act repealed, the Government did not hesitate to hand over the civil administration to the military authorities and proclaim Martial Law, leading to horrors which have staggered humanity. Large masses of unarmed civil

population with even children amongst them, assembled in innocent and peaceful demonstrations have been bombarded and ruthlessly fired upon, without caring to give any kind of assistance to the wounded. People, irrespective of their position in life and education, have been handcuffed in numbers and marched in processions in public thoroughfares in the hot sun of the Punjab summer; others have been publicly flogged and some made to crawl on their bellies like beasts. Water-supply was stopped and lights and fans were cut off from the people. In short, it appeared for a time that no man's property or person was secure in Punjab. Thus, we, who have been soaring high in illusions of peace, prosperity and contentment to follow in the wake of victory, have met with humiliation and suffering in Punjab, the memory of which will ever remain.

The Mohammadans have even gone so far as to join the British Army in large numbers in their steadfast loyalty to their British Sovereign, even though their religious head of the Khalifa was fighting against the English but they had all along a sustaining hope in the pledges, given from time to time by the British statesmen that the temporal power of the Khalifa will not be despoiled and the Moslems' sacred places will not be wrested from the Turkish Sovereignty. But the latest speech of the British Premier on the subject has given a rude shock to their fond hope and their religious feelings have been wounded to an extent that they have already declared a progressive boycott of British goods and recommended a gradual cessation of co-operation with the Government, in the event of Turkish question not being solved to the satisfaction of the Mohammadans.

Thus, when a portion of the peace terms regarding the Khilafat which vitally affects one-fourth of India's population remains undeclared, when the Indian mind can have no peace, with the shrieks of the wounded and the dying still resounding in their ears, when Punjab is crying aloud for redress and punishment of those responsible for the wrongs inflicted on her, and when in defiance of the time-honoured traditions, amnesty has not been granted to the political prisoners and internees, peace celebrations can have no meaning.

We, as Indians, therefore, cannot take any part in them. if we are to be true to our God and Conscience."

The celebrations in Madhya Pradesh could not have been popular, in the circumstances, however spectacular Government may have contrived to make them. The Congress session in 1919 met

appropriately at Amritsar, with Pandit Motilal Nehru as President. He made a touching reference to the horrible scene enacted in that city about eight months previously. "You have assembled here in deep mourning over the cruel murder of hundreds of your brothers, and in electing your president you have assigned to him the role of the chief mourner.

Shortly before the Amritsar Congress was to meet, Government released all political prisoners, probably hoping to create a favourable reception for the Montford Reforms. Ali Brothers, who had been in prison since 1915, were thus set free and were able to reach Amritsar the day before the opening session. From now on the national struggle was strengthened by the tributary stream of the Khilafat movement, and for a time Hindu and Muslim were indistinguishably welded together in a single effort. The Khilafat movement exemplified in a sense the defeat of the Government of India's policy towards Indian Muslims. Since the days of Sir Syeed Ahmed, they had pampered and flattered the Muslim community and brought about a division between them and the Hindus in the freedom struggle. But abroad their attitude, as revealed in their treatment of Turkey, was not marked by any such solicitude. Constantinople was occupied by infidel armies; the Sultan of Turkey, the Khalif of all the faithful, had been reduced to a mere puppet. A process of disintegration of Turkey appeared imminent. The Moslems of India were alarmed at the prospect; and Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali sought Gandhiji's counsel: Gandhiji gave his whole-hearted support to the movement to preserve the sanctity of the Khalifat. In November 1919, a Khilafat Conference was called at Delhi, attended by Hindus and Muslims, and it was here that Gandhiji expounded his policy of Non-co-operation with Government as a political weapon. This was further fortified at the Congress session that followed, and thus ensued a brief but unique period in India's freedom movement when the two great communities strove side by side to oppose the Government by the novel instrument of Non-co-operation. In March 1920, Mohammad Ali led a deputation to England to present to the British Government their views on Turkey. But nothing came of it. On return from England, disappointed and annoyed, Mohammad Ali urged the Muslims to join the Hindus enthusiastically in the struggle. The Swaraj and the Khilafat movements merged together in a prodigious torrent, and for a time Gandhiji and the Ali Brothers became the country's most conspicuous leaders. It was a complete reversal of the situation that prevailed in 1906 after the Partition of Bengal.

Meanwhile, the Reforms Act had been put through. It could not have been inaugurated under a more unfavourable auspices.

Its provisions gave certain numerical advantages to the elected members of the legislatures. Out of a hundred elected seats in the Indian Legislative Assembly five seats were allotted to Madhya Pradesh, and in the Council of States two seats out of a total of 34. The Central Provinces National Liberal Association, the equivalent of the National Liberal Federation in this State, consisting of the old Moderates, provided a lone voice welcoming the Reforms. An appeal signed, among others, by Bipin Krishna Bose, Moropant Joshi and all the other Knights and Squires of the province pleaded the acceptance of the Reforms. They said: "It is only by the goodwill of the British people that India can attain what is the best attainable future, the 'United States of India' under the aegis of the British Empire, a step towards the poet's idea of a 'Federation of the World'. In his eager desire for self-government let not the impatient idealist forget the solid advantages of being a member of the British Empire, the Pax Britannica within India's borders . . . , etc.". It was like an echo from the forgotten world of "prayers, petitions and protests" which had become an anachronism in a changed and intense world where Satyagraha stood face to face with bullets. The national struggle received at this time an accession of strength with the publication of the Hindi weekly *Karmaveer* in Jabalpur under the inspiring guidance of Madhaurao Sapre and editorship of Makhanlal Chaturvedi. Its trenchant articles and high literary quality gave it an immediate popularity and considerable political influence. District Conferences were held in the first half of 1920, explaining the principles of the Swaraj and Khilafat movements. A public meeting was held in Raipur on 17th March 1920 and a Khilafat sub-committee was formed. When Mr. Asgar Ali thanked the Hindu brethren for their sympathy for the Muslim cause, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla retorted, "we are no more Hindus and Muslims, but Hindustanis in the strictest sense". Such was the spirit of those times. The friendliness and comradeship between the two communities appeared to be like the promise of some blessed world where such distinctions are unheard-of. At Hoshangabad Lala Arjun Singh and Thakur Sher Singh ceremoniously dug the first sod of earth in preparing the foundation of a mosque in Machhli Bazaar. Presiding over the District Conference at Jabalpur on 11th April 1920, Dr. Hari Singh Gour harped on the same theme: "We are told that the question of Khilafat has nothing to do with Hindus. But if the question has anything to do with Mohammadans it must necessarily interest us also. For, are there not sixty millions of Muslims in this country, and how can we be dead to what vitally affects so many of our countrymen?" In the latter-day acrimonies

and fierce animosities that poisoned our life, it was embalming to the soul to remember those halcyon days. From district to district, from Jabalpur to Bilaspur, thence to Narsinghpur, the message of the struggle travelled. It was at Narsinghpur, in the third week of May, that Pandit Vishnu Dutt Shukul said that although he was an old co-operator, yet he would not like to disguise the fact that so long as the people's demands were not satisfied, and so long as Government did not give up its policy of repression, agitation must be kept up.

On May 28, 1920, appeared the Hunter Committee Report on the Jallianwala massacre, and it opened up the old wounds again. Government's action on it was most indifferent. The prime villains of the tragedy went scot free, and what was more inhuman, public subscriptions were raised in England for presentation to General Dyer. This appeared to be the coping stone to the edifice of Britain's perfidy. Can any Government condone acts of such brutality and yet be considered moral? If, then, it was an immoral Government, it was the duty of a Satyagrahi to defy and non-co-operate with it. Such was Gandhiji's argument. The All-India Congress Committee met at Banaras on 30th May—two days after the Hunter Committee Report was published—and after recording an indignant protest against the Report, decided to summon a special session of the Congress to consider the matter. A preliminary meeting of all parties was held at Allahabad on 2nd June at which a programme of action was drawn up which included the boycott of schools, colleges and courts.

Before the Special Session of the Congress met at Calcutta in September, India suffered a tragic loss in the death of Lokmanya Tilak. For a few days he lay ill at Sardar Griha in Bombay and the Nation stood with bated breath, praying. But on August 1, 1920, that stout heart, whom no power on earth could have subdued, ceased to beat. There was a mammoth meeting at Nagpur, and indeed in every part of the country, at which the people paid their homage. The Nation stood still, and a country-wide hartal was observed.

The appointed task had, however, to be performed. On 4th September 1920, the Special Session of the Congress met at Calcutta, and continued for five days. Here it was that the programme of non-co-operation was defined. Lajpatrai had recently returned from his exile in America, and was opposed to the idea; C. R. Das was convinced of its unwisdom. There were many others who thought the boycott of the councils and courts was inopportune.



But before this Resolution was taken up, other subjects had to be considered. There was, of course, a touching tribute to the lost leader, Tilak. Then a long resolution tore to pieces the Hunter Report and Government's action on it. And then came the momentous Resolution which was moved by Mahatma Gandhi himself. It was beautifully drafted, and combined the cause of the Muslims with the national cause, and led up to the gospel of non-violence and *khadi*, embodying it in the comprehensive non-co-operation programme. The Resolution said:

"In view of the fact that on the Khilafat question both the Indian and Imperial Governments have signally failed in their duty towards the Muslims of India and the Prime Minister has deliberately broken his pledged word given to them, and that it is the duty of every non-Muslim Indian in every legitimate manner to assist his Muslim brother in his attempt to remove the religious calamity that has overtaken him ;

"And in view of the fact that, in the matter of the events of the April of 1919, both the said Governments have grossly neglected or failed to protect the innocent people of the Punjab and punish officers guilty of unsoldierly and barbarous behaviour towards them, and have exonerated Sir Michael O'Dwyer who proved himself directly responsible for most of the official crimes and callous to the sufferings of the people placed under his administration, and that the debate in the House of Lords betrayed a woeful lack of sympathy with the people of India, and systematic terrorism and frightfulness adopted in the Punjab, and that the latest Viceregal pronouncement is proof of entire absence of repentance in the matters of Khilafat and the Punjab;

"This Congress is of opinion that there can be no contentment in India without redress of the two aforementioned wrongs, and that the only effectual means to vindicate national honour and to prevent a repetition of similar wrongs in future is the establishment of Swarajya ;

"This Congress is further of opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India but to approve of and adopt the policy of progressive non-violent non-co-operation inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi, until the said wrongs are righted and Swarajya is established;

"And inasmuch as a beginning should be made by the classes who have hitherto moulded and represented public opinion and inasmuch as Government consolidates its power

through titles and honours bestowed on the people, through schools controlled by it, its Law Courts and its Legislative Councils, and inasmuch as it is desirable in the prosecution of the movement to take the minimum risk and to call for the least sacrifice compatible with the attainment of the desired object, this Congress earnestly advises—

(a) surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation from nominated seats in Local Bodies;

(b) refusal to attend Government levees, durbars, and other official and semi-official functions held by Government officials, or in their honour;

(c) gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges owned, aided or controlled by Government, and, in place of such schools and colleges, the establishment of national schools and colleges in the various provinces;

(d) gradual boycott of British Courts by lawyers and litigants, and the establishment of private arbitration courts by their aid for the settlement of private disputes;

(e) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia;

(f) withdrawal by candidates of their candidature for election to the Reformed Councils, and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election;

(g) boycott of foreign goods;

“And inasmuch as non-co-operation has been conceived as a measure of discipline and self-sacrifice without which no nation can make real progress, and inasmuch as an opportunity should be given in the very first stage of non-co-operation to every man, woman and child for such discipline and self-sacrifice, this Congress advises adoption of Swadeshi in piece-goods on a vast scale, and inasmuch as the existing mills of India with indigenous capital and control do not manufacture sufficient yarn and sufficient cloth for the requirements of the Nation, and are not likely to do so for a long time to come, this Congress advises immediate stimulation of further manufacture on a large scale by means of reviving hand-spinning in every house and hand-weaving on the part of the millions of weavers who have abandoned their ancient and honourable calling for want of encouragement.”

There was strong opposition to the Resolution from Bipin Chandra Pal and C. R. Das, who did not consider the course of action suggested by the Resolution advantageous to India. But Gandhiji explained his purpose patiently. Though arising immediately out of the Punjab wrongs and Khilafat, the ultimate object of non-co-operation was the obtaining of Swaraj because, as Motilal Nehru said, the absence of Swaraj lay at the root of these two wrongs. "The issue is", said Gandhiji, "whether Swaraj has to be gained through the new Councils or without the Councils. Knowing the British Government to be utterly unrepentant, how can we believe that the new councils will lead to Swaraj?" It was an unforgettable speech—reasoned, moving, unanswerable. He carried the Resolution ultimately, with 1,855 out of a total of 2,728 delegates voting in his favour. With that, the Freedom Movement entered the third and final phase. But it still awaited the endorsement by the annual session of the Congress which was to assemble at Nagpur four months after.

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PART THREE  
Satyagraha and Swaraj



## CHAPTER I

### NAGPUR CONGRESS AND AFTER

The gospel of non-violent non-co-operation is Gandhiji's unique gift to the Nation and to the world : and it was at Nagpur that it was finally and enthusiastically proclaimed. In the long and chequered struggle for our freedom other means had been tried and found infructuous. The Armed revolt of 1857 defeated its own end, because it was subdued by superior force. When the leadership of the Freedom Movement came to the educated and well-to-do middle classes, the method they adopted was one of patient and persistent appeals. For almost a quarter of a century the nation poured forth a stream of petitions and appeals addressed to the British : but these too had proved dupes. What, then, shall the Nation do to gain her freedom ? Gandhiji gave the answer at the special session of the Congress at Calcutta. About ten years later he expounded this new principle to the Western countries in a remarkable speech. He said : "The means adopted by us for attaining liberty are unique, and as far as history shows us, have not been adopted by any other people. Hitherto, nations have fought in the manner of the brute. They have wreaked vengeance upon those whom they have considered to be their enemies. We in India have endeavoured to reverse the process. We feel that the law that governs brute creation is inconsistent with human dignity. I personally would wait, if need be for ages, rather than seek to attain the freedom of my country through bloody means. I feel in the innermost recesses of my heart that the world is sick unto death of blood-spilling. The world is seeking a way out and I flatter myself with the belief that perhaps it will be the privilege of the ancient land of India to show the way out to a hungering world." (Quoted by Louis Fischer: *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 308).

Some official records of the time have suggested that it was the passing of the Reforms Act of 1919 that led Gandhiji to inaugurate non-co-operation. That was not so. In fact at the Amritsar Congress he had even suggested that the Reforms might be tried for a time. It was the heartless attitude of the British towards the Punjab tragedy that provided the immediate provocation. To this was added the cause of the Khilafat. He made it clear in a letter written to the Viceroy on August 1, 1920, a little before the Special Session at Calcutta. "Your Excellency's light-hearted treatment of official crime, your exoneration of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Mr. Montagu's despatch and, above all, the shameful ignorance of the Punjab events and the callous disregard of the feelings of

Indians betrayed by the House of Lords, have filled me with the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the Empire, have estranged me completely from the present Government, and have disabled me from rendering, as I have hitherto whole-heartedly rendered, my loyal co-operation.

"In my humble opinion the ordinary method of agitating by way of petitions, deputations, and the like is no remedy for moving to repentance a Government so hopelessly indifferent to the welfare of its charge as the Government of India has proved to be. In European countries condemnation of such grievous wrongs as the Khilafat and the Punjab events would have resulted in a bloody revolution by the people. They would have resisted, at all costs, national emasculation. Half of India is too weak to offer violent resistance, and the other half is unwilling to do so. I have therefore ventured to suggest the remedy of non-co-operation, which enables those who wish to dissociate themselves from Government, and which, if unattended by violence and undertaken in an ordered manner, must compel it to retrace its steps and undo the wrongs committed; but, whilst I pursue the policy of non-co-operation, in so far as I can carry the people with me, I shall not lose hope that you will yet see your way to do justice."

We have seen how at the Calcutta session the Non-co-operation Resolution was adopted against stiff opposition, especially from C. R. Das and his supporters. In Madhya Pradesh too there was a school which was not in favour of it. On 10th December 1920, a few days before the Congress Session was to begin, Dadasaheb Khaparde published a memorandum pointing out how the Resolution sought to divert the energies of the Congress towards attaining soul force and moral excellence, losing sight of immediate political objects. He argued that by boycotting the Councils we would only avoid contact with the *de facto* government and forgo the training ground for acquiring the kind of political-mindedness necessary for carrying on effective struggle. The non-co-operation movement, he said, may develop powers of endurance but cannot breed the energy and practical wisdom necessary for a political struggle. Thus by a curious reversal, those leaders who under Tilak had considered the Congress of 1906 too moderate and slow, now found that the Congress had outstripped them, leaving their counsel of co-operation far behind.

Opposition to the new policy of the Congress also came from the members of the Imperial Legislative Council who, naturally, were unaccustomed to the rough and unpleasant realities of aggressive politics. They issued a manifesto on the eve of the Nagpur

session saying, "We, the undersigned non-official members of the Imperial Legislative Council, while deeply regretting the resolutions in the House of Lords on the Punjab affairs and the decision of the Allies on the Khilafat question, desire to express our emphatic disapproval of the policy and principle of non-co-operation. It is our deliberate conviction that the movement can do no good, but is fraught with harm to the best interests of the country. It will introduce elements of disorder and discord which will be fatal to the successful working of the Reforms on which the future of the country so largely depends." Those who signed this included Surendranath Banerjee, Srinivas Sastri and Raja of Mahmudabad.

It was amidst fears and apprehensions voiced from so many quarters that the Congress assembled at Nagpur to take the historic decision. The importance of the occasion is indicated by the phenomenal number of about 16,000 delegates who came to Nagpur. Already the message of boycott sounded at the Calcutta session had reached the distant parts of the land. Lawyers and students in their hundreds had begun to quit the portals of courts and educational institutions. Many of them foregathered at the Nagpur session to consecrate their services to the cause of the Nation. A magnificent pandal had been erected at Craddock Town which from that date was re-named Congress Nagar. For the first time all delegates made it a point to come clad in Swadeshi, and most of them donned on their heads the "Gandhi cap" which since then has been accepted as the badge of national service. A long procession of cars, with the Home-Rule flag fluttering on their bonnets, took the delegates and leaders from the railway station to the camp. C. Vijayaraghavachariar, the President, leading the procession. It went through the principal streets of the town lined by enthusiastic crowds. All the leaders were present at the Session, Mahatma Gandhi, Motilal Nehru, Pandit Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, C. R. Das, besides M. A. Jinnah, the Ali Brothers and Maulana Azad. On the dais, in front of the presidential table, stood a life-size oil painting of Lokmanya Tilak who had passed away five months ago.

The Presidential address was a comprehensive and masterly survey of the major issues facing the country. He referred to the Rowlatt Act, the Punjab tragedy, the British reaction to it, the Khilafat movement, the treatment of Indians abroad and the Reforms Act. C. Vijayaraghavachariar himself was not a whole-hearted non-co-operator, and yet he presented the issue in a clear



balanced way, and vacated his chair when that particular subject came for discussion.

Contemporary newspapers referred pointedly to a curious contrast between this gigantic session and the recently concluded general elections. The first elections under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms had proved to be a miserable farce. As many as five seats in Chhattisgarh remained vacant because no one would come forward to contest them. Even where elections were held there was hardly any interest. The Britishers tried to explain this away by saying that it was due to the lack of political consciousness among the people. But the answer to that was the Nagpur session of the Congress, at which more than 22,000 persons, including delegates and visitors were assembled, and the whole country outside was watching expectantly its results. *Amrit Bazaar Patrika* of that date comments that the gathering of such large numbers in "an out of the way place" as Nagpur is a proof of the awakened political consciousness of the people.

The Nagpur Session constituted a land-mark in the national movement. It established finally the unquestionable leadership of Gandhiji in the freedom's struggle. It gave to the movement a dynamic objective and a militant programme. From Nagpur onwards the masses rallied to the movement and swelled its strength. The first Resolution was moved by Mahatma Gandhi defining the creed, and it made significant changes. It no longer stressed the British connection. It said, "within the British Empire, if possible, and without, if necessary." It no longer qualified the means as being "constitutional", but said "the object of the Congress was the attainment of Swaraj by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means." Gandhiji explained the significance of these changes. He said that if the British connection was for the advancement of India, we would not destroy it, but if it was inconsistent with our self-respect then it was our duty to destroy it. He concluded: "If you want to carry this resolution I want you not only to give it your acclamation, but to support it with the faith and determination which nothing on earth can move, that you are intent on getting Swaraj at the earliest possible moment by means that are legitimate, i.e., honourable, by means that are peaceful, that is non-violent. May God grant that you pass this resolution unanimously, and may God grant that you have the courage and ability to carry out the resolution." There was a heated discussion on the resolution. Mr. Jinnah strongly opposed the changes. He persisted in referring to Gandhiji as "Mr. Gandhi", defying the shouts from the audience demanding

the appellation "Mahatma". Mohammad Ali then humorously suggested that he might at least call him 'Maulana'. But Jinnah was unbending. The Resolution on the Creed was, however, adopted with acclamation. There were other resolutions also, one on the removal of untouchability, another on the promotion of Khadi. The support to the Khilafat cause was reaffirmed by another resolution, while yet another created a Tilak Swaraj Fund of a crore of rupees.

The most important Resolution was the fifth, on Non-Co-operation. In the meetings of the Subjects Committee there had been much heat in discussing this resolution. C. R. Das, who had opposed it at Calcutta in September, had brought with him 250 delegates who were to oppose Non-co-operation. But the magic of Gandhiji's persuasion achieved a singular triumph. Not only was opposition silenced but Deshbandhu C. R. Das himself agreed to move the Resolution in the open session. In moving it the Deshbandhu said: "I claim that this Resolution is stronger than the one passed at Calcutta. I claim that it is stronger, fuller and bolder, because this Nation is resolved to put into force the entire scheme of Non-co-operation down to the non-payment of taxes. The call is sounded that every student, every agriculturist, lawyer, trader, everybody in the country should do his bit. It means that India refuses to have anything to do with the tyrannical machinery of Government. Every Indian is resolved not to touch it. I call upon you all, in the name of all that is holy, to carry this Resolution without a dissenting voice". The text of the Resolution read thus:

"Whereas in the opinion of the Congress the existing Government of India has forfeited the confidence of the country, and

"Whereas the people of India are now determined to establish Swaraj, and

"Whereas all methods adopted by the people of India prior to the last Special Session of the Indian National Congress have failed to secure due recognition of their rights and liberties and the redress of their many and grievous wrongs, more specially in reference to the Khilafat and the Punjab,

"Now this Congress, while reaffirming the resolution on Non-violent non-co-operation passed at the Special Session of the Congress at Calcutta, declares that the entire scheme or any part or parts of the scheme of non-violent Non-co-operation, with the renunciation of voluntary association with the present government at one end and the refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put in force at a time to be determined by either the Indian National

Congress or the All-India Congress Committee, and that in the meanwhile, to prepare the country for it, effective steps should continue to be taken in that behalf:

- (a) by calling upon the parents and guardians of school children (and not the children themselves) under the age of 16 years to make greater efforts for the purpose of withdrawing them from such schools, as are owned, aided or in any way controlled by government and concurrently to provide for their training in national schools or by such other means as may be within their power in the absence of such schools ;
- (b) by calling upon students of the age of 16 and over to withdraw without delay, irrespective of consequences, from institutions owned, aided or in any way controlled by Government, if they feel that it is against their conscience to continue in institutions which are dominated by a system of government which the nation has solemnly resolved to bring to an end, and advising such students either to devote themselves to some special service in connection with the Non-co-operation movement or to continue their education in national institutions ;
- (c) by calling upon trustees, managers and teachers of government affiliated or aided schools and Municipalities and Boards to help to nationalise them;
- (d) by calling upon lawyers to make greater effort to suspend their practise and to devote their attention to national service including boycott of law courts by litigants and fellow lawyers and the settlement of disputes by private arbitration ;
- (e) in order to make India economically independent and self-contained by calling upon merchants and traders to carry out a gradual boycott of foreign trade relations, to encourage hand-spinning and hand-weaving and in that behalf by having a scheme of economic boycott planned and formulated by a committee of experts to be nominated by the All-India Congress Committee ;
- (f) and generally, in as much as self-sacrifice is essential to the success of non-co-operation, by calling upon every section and every man and woman in the country to make the utmost possible contribution of self-sacrifice to the national movement ;

- (g) by organising committees in each village or group of villages with a provincial central organisation in the principal cities of each province for the purpose of accelerating the progress of non-co-operation ;
- (h) by organising a band of national workers for a service to be called the Indian National Service ;
- (i) by taking effective steps to raise a national fund to be called the All-India Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund for the purpose of financing the foregoing National Service and the Non-co-operation movement in general.

“This Congress congratulates the nation upon the progress made so far in working the programme of Non-co-operation, specially with regard to the boycott of Councils by the voters, and claims in the circumstances in which they have been brought into existence, that the new councils do not represent the country, and trusts that those who have allowed themselves to be elected in spite of the deliberate absention from the polls of an overwhelming majority of their constituencies, will see their way to resign their seats in the Councils, and that if they retain their seats in spite of the declared wish of their respective constituencies in direct negation of the principle of democracy, the electors will studiously refrain from asking for any political service from such council'ors.

“This Congress recognises the growing friendliness between the Police and the soldiery and the people, and hopes that the former will refuse to subordinate their creed and country to the fulfilment of orders of their officers, and by courteous and considerate behaviour towards the people, will remove the reproach hitherto levelled against them that they are devoid of any regard for the feeling and sentiments of their own people ;

“And this Congress appeals to all people in Government employment pending the call of the nation for resignation of their service, to help the national cause by importing greater kindness and stricter honesty in their dealings with their people and fearlessly and openly to attend all popular gatherings whilst refraining from taking any active part therein, and, more specially, by openly rendering financial assistance to the national movement.

“This Congress desires to lay special emphasis on non-violence being the integral part of the Non-co-operation Resolution, and in thought, word and deed is as essential between people themselves as in respect of the Government, and this Congress is of opinion

that the spirit of violence is not only contrary to the growth of a true spirit of democracy, but actually retards the enforcement (if necessary) of the other stages of Non-co-operation.

"Finally, in order that the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs may be redressed and Swaraj established within one year, this Congress urges upon all public bodies, whether affiliated to the Congress or otherwise, to devote their exclusive attention to the promotion of non-violence and non-co-operation which can only be succeeded by complete co-operation amongst the people themselves, this Congress calls upon public associations to advance Hindu-Muslim unity and the Hindu delegates of this Congress call upon the leading Hindus to settle all disputes between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, wherever they may be existing, and to make a special effort to rid Hinduism of the reproach of untouchability, and respectfully urges the religious heads to help the growing desire to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes."

After Deshbandhu Das had moved the Resolution, Gandhiji rose to second it. He emphasised the principle of non-violence and said, "You will eschew violence in thought, deed and word, whether in connection with Government or with ourselves, and I would repeat the promise that I made that we do not require even one year to get Swaraj". Other speakers among whom were Lala Lajpatrai and Bipin Chandra Pal supported the resolution. Pandit Motilal Nehru, who was presiding during these discussions, the president having vacated the Chair for the purpose, invited any one who wanted to oppose the resolution to come forward, who would be given two minutes. No one came up. The resolution was carried with thunderous acclamations. Thousands of delegates stood up shouting "Gandhiji ki Jai". Flowers were showered upon Mahatma Gandhi where he sat. It was a moving and inspiring scene. The Nation had chosen its leader.

Before this momentous session ended it passed another resolution which was destined to have far-reaching influence on the country in the years to come. It was here, at Nagpur, that Congress adopted the linguistic principle for the realignment of provinces. Accordingly, it formed the Provincial Congress Committees on that basis. The result was that the Central Provinces were grouped under three committees, the Berar, later called Vidarbha Provincial Committee, the Hindi C. P., later called Mahakoshal Provincial Committee, and the Marathi C. P. which became later the Nagpur Provincial Committee. This had an important consequence in the growth of the movement in Madhya Pradesh. Formerly all political activity was centered at Nagpur, but now,

Jabalpur and Amravati which were the centres of the other two provincial committees also became the radiating nuclei of Congress work from where the movement spread out into the districts. In this sense the formation of the linguistic committees of the Congress did help in the National Movement.

The Nagpur Congress helped to make the organization vigorous, disciplined and purposeful, possessing a vital programme and substantial financial resources. The Congress acquired clearly marked items of political and constructive activity. Under Gandhiji's leadership it not only inaugurated the Non-violent Non-co-operation movement for political freedom, but the khadi, prohibition and anti-untouchability programmes of social reconstruction. The Congress became a comprehensive organization touching the life of the people at all points. Soon after the session concluded, the Congress went about the task of implementing its decisions in a businesslike manner. The newly-formed All-India Congress Committee consisting of 350 representatives met on 1st January 1921 and drew up a plan to implement the Congress Resolution. A committee of nine was appointed for this purpose. For months thousands of Congress workers, among whom were students, teachers, professional men and women who had given up their vocation, went out into the villages with the new teaching on their lips. Outstanding among those who made colossal sacrifice were Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, each throwing up a princely practice at the Bar. The National leaders went from Province to Province, preaching swadeshi, hand-spinning, boycott of all Government posts and prohibition. Students collected heaps of foreign cloth, some men almost stripping themselves of what they were wearing, throwing into the heap hats, ties, trousers, and then ceremoniously setting fire to the heap. Thus the months of 1921 went by, the tempo of the National Movement rapidly rising throughout the land, and the magic words, Swaraj, Swadeshi and Gandhi spreading far into the remotest villages. Children in schools who had never been out of their villages or even seen a railway train prattled these words and waved the national flag.

The Nagpur Session of the Congress gave a tremendous fillip to the movement in Madhya Pradesh. Soon after the close of the Session Mahatma Gandhi toured the Province, and explained to the people the decisions taken by the Congress. Pandit Sunderlal and Bhagwandin made the Central Provinces their home and established a Non-Co-operators' Ashram, and the Tilak Vidyalyaya at Nagpur. Hundreds of students left schools and colleges and joined the Tilak Vidyalyaya and the National College. The

volunteers in Nagpur took up the Prohibition programme enthusiastically and organised a citywide picketing of liquor shops. It was so effective that when Government began to auction liquor shops in February as usual, they found difficulty in getting bidders to come forward, and there was a heavy fall in the excise revenue. Some of the leaders of this movement, like Dr. Cholkar and Dr. Paranjpe, were arrested, but this only served to intensify the picketing further. Government appeared to be touched to the quick by this programme of the Congress more than by any other, because it affected their excise income which at that time was second in importance only to the land revenue. On 27th January the police opened fire on a crowd of picketers as a result of which ten persons were killed. It was the first instance of police firing in Nagpur since the movement started, but was certainly not the last. It sent a wave of horror and anger throughout the State, and helped to make the people more determined. The Nagpur District Council, which had earlier decided not to welcome the Duke of Connaught, voted Rs. 2,000 for carrying out the picketing of liquor shops. The lawyers gave up their practice at considerable personal loss, and some who could not go so far, insisted on entering the courts with Gandhi caps on, thus calling upon themselves the wrath of the officials. The District Councils insisted on hoisting the national flag on their buildings defying the Government's orders. All this served an important psychological purpose. It shook people out of their mood of fear and subservience, and it also shook the prestige of the British Government. To a people, whom generations of subjection had rendered meek and helpless this was a new experience. To be able to look the mighty powers in the face, to hold one's head high, to defy anything unjust and to pay the price of defiance by unrepentant suffering—this indeed was the sign of national maturity. This was the transformation that Gandhiji wrought upon the people.

The new mood was best reflected in the Hindi C. P. Provincial Political Conference held at Jabalpur in May 1921. Dr. Raghavendra Rao presided over the conference which was attended by a record number of delegates and visitors. The address of the Chairman, Reception Committee, Seth Govind Das and the presidential address set the note for the entire proceedings. They exposed the hollowness of the Reforms and the opportunism of those who had entered the Councils. "We hold the view", Dr. Rao said, "that the present system of Government is morally indefensible, politically insensible and is intended to emasculate our manhood and to complete the process of our economic subjection". He

defended the policy of non-co-operation on the ground that it was based on the traditions and morality of our race. "Our habits of thought, our past history and national character point in the direction of winning our enemies by allowing ourselves to suffer rather than inflict violence on our opponents". Earlier the delegates to the Conference were welcomed by the Chairman of the Reception Committee, Seth Govind Das. Since, at the time of the Conference he had been laid up with high fever, the address was read on his behalf by Shri Nathuram Modi. In his address Seth Govind Das gave a detailed account of the progress of the non-co-operation movement in the Hindi C. P. area and said that, on every item, such as, boycott of councils, boycott of schools and colleges and boycott of law courts, the people in that area had achieved conspicuous results. As many as 35 lawyers had, by that time, given up their practice. Speaking with particular reference to the contribution of the students in the National Movement, he said: "The most effective propagation of the Congress ideal has been made by batches of young students going round the lanes and streets of the town singing national songs. The result of this is that these patriotic songs are on the lips of the common masses and the people have been awakened to a new national spirit". The conference set up a committee for Mahakoshal with Dr. Rao as president and prepared a programme for intensive political propaganda throughout the area.

The newly formed Hindi C. P. Provincial Congress Committee met on the 27th November 1921 at Sagar and was attended by 63 members. Dr. Raghavendra Rao was elected President, while Shri Umakant Balwant Ghate, Seth Govind Das and Abdul Kadir Siddiqui were elected Vice-Presidents. The Secretaries were Shri K. R. Khandekar, and Thakur Laxman Singh. The Committee also elected the representatives to the All-India Congress Committee among whom were Shyam Sunder Bhargava, Pandit R. S. Shukla, Nathuram Modi, Ghanshyam Singh Gupta and Thakur Chhedilal. The committee adopted a resolution to implement the plan of Satyagraha in the region. "In the opinion of the committee, non-violence is the main condition for the individual and mass satyagraha and that the committee should organise satyagraha in areas most suitable for the movement as soon as possible including no-tax campaign, provided the committee is satisfied that the conditions laid down by the All-India Congress Committee are complete." The Hindi C. P. Committee met again in January 1922 at Hoshangabad at which it was decided to collect a lakh and a half rupees for the Tilak Swarajya Fund. A Rashtriya



Shiksha Mandal was also formed for controlling all the national schools in the province, and Dr. Raghavendra Rao, Thakur Chhedilal and Shyam Sunder Bhargava were elected members of the Shiksha Board. Regarding Satyagraha, they adopted the following resolution :

“In the light of the resolution passed by the Ahmedabad Session, the Provincial Congress Committee orders that the working committee should select a rural area of any district within ten days where a favourable atmosphere of mass satyagraha may be prepared. The working committee should then start the mass satyagraha whenever and wherever it decides.”

Able leaders sprang up to carry forward the work. Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi and Madhavrao Sapre had already created a powerful organ in Karmaveer at Jabalpur. Others like Seth Govind Das, Shyam Sunder Bhargava, Nathuram Modi and Gyanchandra Verma in Jabalpur, Khandekar in Sagar, Umakant Ghate and Salpekar in Chhindwara, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla and Dr. Raghavendra Rao in Chhattisgarh mobilised the public enthusiasm and support in these areas where political awareness had not been conspicuous in the first decade of the century. In Berar where the national movement had taken firm root long before it spread to other parts of the Province, it now progressed under the leadership of B. G. Khaparde, Dr. Moonje, M. S. Aney and Veer Wamanrao Joshi. The inauguration of the Non-co-operation Movement, however, resulted in the growth of divergent opinions in Berar. We have already seen how, on the eve of the Nagpur Session of the Congress, Dadasaheb Khaparde had voiced his apprehension regarding the policy of Non-co-operation and boycott. There was a school of thought owing its allegiance to Tilak, which was of the same opinion as Dadasaheb. But Veer Wamanrao Joshi, and his followers were of a different view and whole-heartedly supported Non-co-operation. In the pursuit of this policy Veer Wamanrao Joshi had, in fact, already felt the blow of official persecution having been sentenced under section 124-A.

Meanwhile Chelmsford completed his term as Viceroy, which coincided with the conclusion of the Budget Session of the newly elected legislatures at the Centre and in the provinces. On 2nd April 1921 Lord Reading succeeded Chelmsford. He was a different kind of man from his predecessor. He gave the impression of being an intellectual, astute and brilliant, with a remarkably

successful career which had made him Lord Chief Justice of England before being appointed Viceroy of India. The non-co-operation movement was at its height when he took office, and soon after, through the intervention of Pandit Malaviya, a meeting between him and Gandhiji was arranged. In the latter part of May 1921, the two met and had thirteen hours of discussions spread over five days. It is interesting to read what the Viceroy thought of Gandhiji. Writing to his son in England Lord Reading says: "He came in a white *dhoti* and cap woven on a spinning wheel, with bare feet and legs, and my first impression on seeing him ushered into the room was that there was nothing to arrest attention in his appearance.....But when he talks, the impression is different. He is direct, and expresses himself well in excellent English with a fine appreciation of the value of the words he uses. There is no hesitation about him and there is a ring of sincerity in all that he utters, save when discussing some political questions. His religious and moral views are admirable and are on a remarkably high altitude, though I must confess, I find it difficult to understand his practice of them in politics..... Our conversations were of the frankest; he was supremely courteous with manners of distinction." (Louis Fischer: *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 217).

Nothing tangible resulted from this interview, which was not surprising. The only consequence was that at Reading's request, Gandhiji persuaded Maulana Mohammad Ali to clarify that he intended his Khilafat movement to follow the path of non-violence. The Maulana accordingly issued a statement that he would not "directly or indirectly advocate violence at present or in future nor create an atmosphere of preparedness for violence as long as we are associated with the movement of non-violent non-co-operation". But this did not mean that they would give up the struggle. The Khilafat Conference held at Karachi in August passed a resolution calling upon Muslims to refuse to serve Government not only in civil but also in a military capacity. Shortly after this Mohammad Ali was arrested, and it was followed by the arrest of his brother Maulana Shaukat Ali also. They were tried for causing disaffection in the army and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. On October 5th the Congress Working Committee met in Bombay and adopted a resolution almost identical with that passed by the Khilafat Conference at Karachi, declaring that "it is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connections with the Government and find some other means of livelihood." In other words, the Congress too was now asking the soldiers to leave the army.

It was while the country was in this mood that the Prince of Wales, who later became King Edward VIII, decided to visit India. A hartal was declared wherever the Prince went. In the Central Assembly a resolution was moved by Dr. Hari Singh Gour proposing that a welcome address be drafted and presented to the Prince of Wales during his visit to India. Among the few who strongly opposed the resolution was Shri K. B. L. Agnihotri of Bilaspur who, though not a Congressman at the time, refused to be a party to the welcome. In opposing the resolution he said: "From the attitude of the people, as is apparent from the demonstrations all over the country, it is clear that the visit will be boycotted by the public whose representatives we claim to be. It is true, having the means and the power, this House can make the visit successful in some ways, but will that be regarded as having been done in our representative character or according to the wishes of the people? The passing of this resolution by this House, I respectfully beg to submit, will have the effect of further exasperating Indian public opinion." No doubt the resolution was passed in spite of this opposition. In the Provincial Legislature at Nagpur the motion to present a Welcome Address to the Prince was opposed by K. P. Pande who feelingly argued: "The Punjab grievances are not redressed. The Khilafat question is yet in the melting pot. Many of the non-co-operators are rotting in jail, and many think that it is better to be inside than outside the jails. What has brought the country to such a dire state of desperation? It is the policy of our Indian Government.....I regret I cannot support this resolution either on my behalf or on behalf of the constituency which I represent." The only other member to oppose it was R. M. Deshmukh who said, "Our Royal Highness is coming to India under such circumstances that I, as a loyal citizen of his, feel very reluctant to be a party to an organization for his reception." The atmosphere in Nagpur was so tense that the Reception to the Prince of Wales had to be held on the grounds of the Government House instead of in the Council Hall. The hartal was complete in all the big cities that the Prince visited: Calcutta, Allahabad, Lahore, Bombay. At Bombay there were clashes between the volunteers and the Police. Gandhiji was grieved, and underwent a five days' fast. Government set about arresting the leaders and the Congress volunteers in large numbers. Within a few days C. R. Das, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru were in jail. By December 1921 more than twenty thousand congressmen had been locked up in prison.

Thus, when the annual session of the Congress assembled at Ahmedabad in the last week of December 1921, not only was the President-elect of the year, Desbandhu C. R. Das, in jail but thousands of others were also locked up preventing their attending the session. The atmosphere was tense, the attendance less than usual. Curiously enough the Government Report for the year, referring to the small attendance at the Congress, explains that it was partly the result of "the presence of the Prince of Wales at Calcutta, and the brilliant festivities which accompanied his welcome." The truth is that in Calcutta the hartal was so successful that even the butchers were on strike, and the official minions were hard put to it to find the meat to load the banquet table. The Ahmedabad Congress reaffirmed the Non-co-operation resolution. But Swaraj which was expected in a year was still far away. Every one seemed to expect a new move from Mahatma Gandhi. A mass civil disobedience on an issue like the non-payment of tax seemed to be an effective method of struggle. But the great leader, who was also an expert strategist was looking for the proper time, place and occasion. The delegates returned to their several places expectant and prepared. Just before they dispersed Gandhiji had gone from camp to camp explaining to the delegates the principles and technique of Civil Disobedience and the essence of Non-violence.

The year 1922 dawned and Gandhiji was ready with the programme of mass civil disobedience. Bardoli was to be the scene, a compact, disciplined agricultural population of 87,000 persons; and the issue was the non-payment of the enhanced land tax. But before this vital movement could be launched came the terrible news of the tragedy at Chauri Chaura. On the 8th February the Bardoli campaign was to have been launched, but only a few days before, on 4th February, a Congress procession led by the National Volunteers passed along the street at Chauri Chaura. People at the rear end complained that some constables had abused them. Then, in the words of Gandhiji, writing in *Young India*, "the mob turned. The constables opened fire. The little ammunition they had was exhausted and they retired to the *thana* for safety. The mob, my informant tells me, therefore, set fire to the *thana*. The self-imprisoned constables had to come out for dear life and as they did so they were hacked to pieces and the mangled remains were thrown into the raging flames." This version, as described by Gandhiji himself, has been quoted in order to indicate what mental anguish he would have suffered on hearing this action of the Congress volunteers, which explains why he forthwith suspended the Bardoli campaign and withdrew the Non-co-operation movement from the whole country. The nation had been keyed up for the

big movement ; repression had whetted their spirits; the moment had come when at the leader's word in every town and even village, masses of people would have defied the law. The flood-gates were about to be opened: and at that moment Gandhiji cried halt. And that was the moment chosen by Lord Reading to seize the man who had stood between the Government and the deluge. Gandhiji was arrested on 10th March 1922. It was a Friday. At 10-30 in the evening the Superintendent of Police rode up to the Sabarmati Ashram and stopped his car about half a furlong from Gandhiji's hut. He sent a word through one of the members of the Ashram that the Mahatma was under arrest and should get ready to go with him. About half a dozen Ashramites were with him at that time when the news was announced. He did not take much time to get ready, but before leaving asked his companions to join him in singing his favourite hymn '*Vaishava Janato*'. And immediately in a smiling and happy mood he walked up to the car and was taken to the Sabarmati Jail.

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## CHAPTER II

### 'TO CHANGE OR NOT TO CHANGE'

#### I

The timing of Gandhiji's arrest is significant. For two years he had been preaching defiance of law, but Government did not touch him. Ever since Lord Reading took office Whitehall had been suggesting to him the need to arrest the leaders of the non-co-operation movement. But the Viceroy stayed his hand. The wave of national movement was surging up throughout the country in the months following the Nagpur Congress, and Gandhiji was on the crest of the wave. Lord Reading feared what uncontrollable storm he might let loose in the country if he seized Gandhiji at that time. When the year 1922 opened, Montagu, the Secretary of State, again asked the Viceroy to arrest the Congress leaders including Gandhiji. But the moment was not yet ripe for Government. Then came Chauri Chaura and the suspension of the movement. Nothing perhaps brings out the unique greatness of Gandhiji—his courage which knows no flinching, his fearless espousal of non-violence even in the teeth of unpopularity—as this act of withdrawal of the Non-co-operation movement as soon as he saw it drift to violence. But Gandhiji's greatness was Government's opportunity. The country was dumb-founded at this sudden turn. Many in the Congress too were vexed and disappointed. For the second time the leader had buoyed up the nation with the hope of a struggle only to let them down. With glee Lord Reading wrote: "Gandhi had pretty well run himself into the last ditch as a politician". To arrest him now would be safe: there would be no conflagration. There was none. "I have had no trouble so far arising from Gandhi's arrest", wrote Reading with satisfaction. But what the Viceroy did not realise was that his action in arresting him, and even more, in trying him helped Gandhiji to reach the hearts of his people, soothe their annoyance at the suspension of the movement, and win their love in even greater measure than before. The crowds that filled the court-room during his trial wept when they heard the sentence of six years' imprisonment pronounced. Many fell at his feet. He was firmly in the hearts of the people as their undisputed hero.

But for some time he was not there to lead them. Satyagraha had been suspended. Many other leaders, like Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das, were also in jail. What was the country now to

do? True, there were the legislatures; for about fifteen months they had been decorously debating under the indulgent eye of Bureaucracy. They had, however, served some purpose in voicing public grievances. The fact that these were uttered by the mildest of moderates must at least prove how deep-seated the grievances should be. In Madhya Pradesh Legislative Council there were some Liberals, such as Gangadhar Rao Chitnavis, who was the President of the Council, B. K. Bose, M. V. Joshi, N. A. Dravid, K. P. Pande, R. M. Deshmukh and G. P. Jaiswal. In the August 1921 Session of the Council, G. P. Jaiswal brought up a Resolution asking for an enquiry into the economic condition of the peasantry and the establishment of Debt Conciliation Boards. Official opposition naturally forced the mover to withdraw the Resolution, but the debate served to focus public attention on the problem, so that more effective action could be taken some time later. During the Winter Session of the Council in the same year a Resolution moved by Mohamad Ahmad brought to public notice the ill-treatment of political prisoners by the Police and Jail authorities. The Resolution, as amended by K. P. Pande, read: "This Council recommends that standing orders be immediately issued to Police and Jail authorities in every district to treat political prisoners with general civility when on trial and after conviction according to their social position in life.". Speaking on this motion, the mover referred to the callous manner in which highly respected leaders had been treated by the police. He said: "A political offender when arrested is, as a rule, handcuffed and paraded along the streets. I do not know if this is done with a view to strike terror in the minds of the people and to inspire awe and fear regarding the might of the Government. Let me humbly inform the mighty Government that such a course seeks rather to create a feeling of defiance and bitterness than a feeling of awe and fear. The people have begun to believe that 'iron bars do not a prison make', and that the country's cause requires that they should manfully suffer imprisonment.". The motion was, surprisingly enough, adopted by the House, in spite of the Home Member's protestations.

The ill-treatment of political leaders came up again in a subsequent session of the Council producing considerable heat. The occasion was provided by an incident at Raipur. On 25th March 1922, the Provincial Conference was held there with Shri Umakant Balwant Ghate as president. Gandhiji had been arrested and sentenced, political life in the country was rather subdued, and Bureaucracy was in a gloating mood. The District Police in Raipur decided that they should provoke the organisers of the conference by demanding entry into the pandal for a police officer in

addition to the two for whom passes had been issued. Word had reached the conference office about this move. News had come that the police had decided to arrest Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla. It had been brought to the conference camp by Pandit Dwarka Prasad Mishra who, since the historic Nagpur Session, had joined the ranks of the Congress having given up his studies at Allahabad. The plan of the police was to provoke the organisers of the conference by forcing entry into the meeting, and, if prevented—as they hoped they would be—then the arrest could be made easily. That decided the issue. Pandit Shukla himself, with Wamanrao Lakhe, Madhorao Sapre, Pandit Dwarka Prasad Mishra and Raghavendra Rao went to the entrance to await the gate-crashing police. At about two in the afternoon, when the conference was about to begin, the City Inspector accompanied by Extra-Assistant Commissioner, two sub-inspectors and about eight or nine constables arrived at the gate. When a sub-inspector advanced forward trying to enter the compound, Pandit Shukla asked him if he had a ticket, and suggested that, if not, he should buy one before he entered. The sub-inspector was not used to that kind of behaviour, and he tried to force himself in between where Pandit Shukla and Wamanrao Lakhe stood hand-in-hand. The linked hands would not allow him to break through, and the City Inspector immediately ordered the arrest of Pandit Shukla. He clamped on his hands the pair of handcuffs which had been brought for the purpose, and he was led along the street to the kotwali where he was locked up.

The incident became a major political issue. The action of the police had been wholly contrary to law. There was no rule entitling police officers to free entrance into the conference. It was a grossly high-handed action made worse by their deliberate offensiveness in handcuffing and detaining for over forty hours an eminent leader of the province. It was so outrageous that sixteen constables in the town resigned in protest. Government was forced to conduct an enquiry, and Latham, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, was entrusted with it. When he asked Pandit Shukla to give his statement, the latter refused saying that the outrage had been committed in public while he was doing a public duty, and, therefore, he had nothing personal to say. Months later, when the Legislative Council met in September 1922, the question was debated with great heat on a motion for enquiry brought forward by N. A. Dravid. For two full days the debate went on, and while speaker after speaker pointed out the unjust provocative nature of the police conduct, the Chief Secretary and the Home Member were unmoved, and the motion was, in the end,



lost—twenty-two members voting for it and thirty-two against. It nonetheless served its purpose. It proclaimed the reaction of even moderate opinion on the conduct of authority, and exposed it in its true nakedness.

Later in the year, in the November 1922 session, Anandī Prasad brought another resolution recommending the release of all political prisoners. When the Home Member argued that they could be released if they apologised or offered security, Seth Sheolal retorted: "Sir, political prisoners who are serving their terms of imprisonment believe that they are serving their country by remaining in jails and, therefore, they neither apologise nor give any security." The Resolution was, as usual, lost—ten voting for and thirty-one against. But, again, it had its political value. Apart from these debates of a political nature, the Council also did some useful work. The Nagpur University Bill was passed and put on the Statute Book, while in the Central Legislature some important pieces of legislation such as, The Indian Factories Act, the Indian Mines Act, and the Workman's Compensation Act were passed, and some unwanted laws like the Rowlatt Act and the Press Act of 1910 were repealed.

It was, therefore, natural that with active political agitation more or less quiescent, persons should begin to think of the legislatures as possible alternative spheres of action. Some of them even felt that the Councils could be used in obstructing the machinery of Government as well as for getting some desirable work done. Most of all, the councils could be used as a forum for ventilating the grievances of the country. The Committee appointed by the Congress Working Committee in June 1922 to report on the preparedness of the country for Civil Disobedience recommended among other things that "Non-co-operators should contest the election on the issue of the redress of the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs and immediate Swaraj, and make every endeavour to be returned in a majority." This recommendation had, of course, to be considered by the Gaya Session of the Congress to be held later in the year. The trend of opinion in one important section of the Nagpur Congress Committee was also taking the direction of legislative activity. Dr. Moonje, who took the lead in this matter gathered round him a strong group, and a recommendation was made to the All-India Congress Committee urging "the principle of agitation to be mainly to face Government and capture all public bodies, including Councils, with a view to carry out the policy of non-co-operation." In Berar too the enthusiasm for the programme of Civil Disobedience was waning. In fact Berar had

not at any time wholly accepted the programme of non-co-operation. Dadasaheb Khaparde was a strong Tilakite and was convinced that Tilak would not have accepted the policy of non-co-operation. For this reason the leadership in Berar during the days of non-co-operation had passed into the hands of Vir Wamanrao Joshi who was now in jail having been sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment under section 124-A. Thus the views of the Berar Congress Committee also were now veering round to Dr. Moonje's.

The Mahakhosal Committee largely stood by the mandate of Gandhiji and was earnest about carrying forward the constructive programme, while the political struggle was under suspension. But here too a clear section was emerging which felt drawn towards Council-entry and resistance from within. These developments were but a reflection of the re-thinking that was taking place in the Congress at the All-India level. To change or not to change, whether it was better to stand firm in the path of self-purification, khadi, untouchability and moral uplift, or to take a realistic hold on ourselves and enter the Councils, and by entering wreck them—that was the question which faced all Congressmen when they gathered for the annual session at Gaya. But Gaya decided clearly for the sterner though, in the opinion of many, not opportune course of keeping out of the legislatures. The eloquence of C. R. Das, the logic of Pandit Motilal Nehru, the dialectic of Srinivasa Iyengar proved of no avail in changing the Congress from the Gandhian path whose exponent at the Gaya session was C. Rajagopalachari. Though agreeing with the Civil Disobedience Committee that the moment was not ripe for a mass movement, the Congress decided that they should prepare the country to be in readiness for it.

It is profitable to enquire into the causes for such a divergence in the Congress opinion which occurred time and again, separating one group that stood solely for political activity from the other which considered political activity subordinate to the regenerating and constructive programme. Gandhism is a composite philosophy in which political activity, social revival, economic self-reliance and spiritual integrity are all contributing elements. Whenever Gandhiji launched his Movement full blast all these aspects found expression, and jointly went to make that enormous mass power which is always its distinguishing feature. But at times when the Movement had spent itself, before it gathered strength again for another upsurge, Gandhiji would withdraw some of the dynamic elements in his philosophy, such as political agitation, and keep

up only the other less spectacular and more subtle activities, like spinning, social reform and education. There were many among his ardent followers who accepted the philosophy in its entirety, who would toil in the villages or fight in the legislatures with equal enthusiasm. But there were others who by temperament and training could bend their energies only to one aspect of Gandhiji's campaigns, the political aspect. Conversely there were others, like Acharya Vinoba, who were happy only in the constructive aspect of his programme. Therefore, whenever during the interregnum between sweeping movements, such as occurred in 1923 or again in 1934, Gandhiji concentrated purely on the constructive work, those of the other group sought the legislative sphere for the expression of their energies. It is clear that such diversions never indicated a recantation of Gandhism nor any disloyalty to his principles. On the contrary the work done by Congressmen in the legislatures during the periods of Council-entry whether after 1923 elections or after the 1926 elections, was conceived in the Gandhian spirit and contributed not a little to buoying up of the national impulse. V. J. Patel's Presidentship of the Legislative Assembly, C. R. Das's work in the Bengal Council, Motilal Nehru's fights in the Central Legislature are all glowing episodes in our freedom struggle. True, this was not evident to the people at the time when the political divergence took place: but looking back on it from present day it is abundantly clear to us.

Thus it happened that with the beginning of 1923 an able and powerful group led by C. R. Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru set about forming the Swarajist Party to carry the fight into the legislatures. Soon after the Gaya Session the aims and objects and the constitution of a Congress-Khilafat Swaraj Party were announced by C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Hakim Ajmal Khan. The new party was clearly stated to be within the body of the Congress with the purpose of attaining Swaraj through a programme including Council-entry as explained by C. R. Das. Through the first half of 1923 the conflict of ideals between these two wings of the Congress greatly paralysed all political activity. The result was that public agitation, though simmering on many issues, failed to find effective expression. One specific question was particularly prominent. The Budget of 1923 revealed a large deficit and in order to bridge it, it was proposed to enhance the Salt Tax by a hundred per cent. The Delhi Session of the Assembly voted against this enhancement and the Viceroy, exercising his special powers for the second time, certified the Finance Bill with the Salt Tax at the enhanced figure. It was an excellent opportunity for the nation to demonstrate the hollowness of the

Reforms and protest against the Viceroy's defiance of the wishes of the legislature. Even the Government of India's Annual Report admits that "had the Non-Co-operation Party been possessed of anything like its former vigour, it is quite possible that the certification of the Salt Tax might have provided it with a fresh lease of life." (*India in 1922-23* p. 297.) But then, the hollowness of the Reforms had been adequately and painfully brought home even to those Liberals who had joined in working them. Early in 1923 Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru resigned from the Executive Council of Government of India. This was followed by the resignation of Sir Chimanlal Setalvad from Bombay Government and C. Y. Chintamani and Jagat Narain from U.P. Government. A number of events, besides the use of the Viceroy's special powers, had resulted in their disillusionment about the Reforms. In fact with the exist of Montagu from the India Office (he left on 9th March 1922 and Gandhiji was arrested on 10th March), and with the appointment of Viscount Peel as Secretary of State for India, the veil of pretext and make-believe about the Reforms had been dropped. In January 1923 the outspoken Dispatch from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy gave the quietus to any hope of amplifying the Reforms. The appointment of the Lee Commission following Lloyd George's notorious "Steel Frame" speech in the British Parliament. made it obvious that the strangle-hold of the Bureaucracy on India was, if anything, to be tightened more firmly. Gleefully looking forward to this prospect, the British Civil Service became obstreperous. The members of the Service in Central Provinces made themselves specially conspicuous in this attitude when they gave evidence before the Lee Commission. "A far more unabashed piece of effrontery was the Memorandum presented by the C. P. and Berar Association. The frankness with which that Memorandum comprehensively cursed the Reforms, the Indian Press, politicians and Indian officials and, in a minor key, the Government of India and the India Office, might stagger any casual reader. It was exactly on all fours with the Memorandum of the Civil Servants of C. P. and Berar, sent to the Secretary of State for India eighteen months ago. The Services in that Memorandum took the astonishing step of arraigning the Government of India before the Secretary of State who himself did not escape sly digs. . . . The present Memorandum was the same retouched here and there." (Mitra: *Indian Annual Register* 1923 Vol. II.) The Services in Central Provinces were perhaps emboldened by the fact that one of the members of the Commission was that old sun-dried bureaucrat of this Province, Sir Reginald Craddock whose heart, they knew, was with them,

Meanwhile the Congress made earnest efforts to effect an understanding between the two wings in view of the forthcoming general elections. On May 25th the All-India Congress Committee met at Bombay. M. V. Abhyankar who was by then the acknowledged leader of the Nagpur Congress Committee, moved a resolution declaring Council-entry at the next elections a part of the Congress programme, while Purushottam Das Tandon moved a compromise resolution reconciling the two views, and Jawaharlal Nehru supported it. After two days of discussions Shri Tandon's Resolution was passed, 96 voting for it and 71 against it. The resolution said that since there was a strong body of opinion within the Congress in favour of contesting elections, and the existing divisions amongst Congressmen were weakening its influence, it was absolutely necessary to close up their ranks and present a united front and no propaganda should be carried amongst the voters in furtherance of the Gaya Resolution relating to Council boycott. Although this seemed to settle the issue, it brought no real unanimity.

## II

At about this time the No-Changers were demonstrating in Nagpur that the spirit of agitation and defiance of Government's authority was still vigorous. From April to August 1923, the attention of the whole country had been drawn by the determined and dramatic tussle between the Congress and the local authorities at Nagpur on the issue of the National Flag. It has actually first started at Jabalpur when the Congress members of the Municipality decided to hoist the National Flag on the municipal buildings. Ever since the Congress launched on a militant programme under Gandhiji's lead it had adopted the tricolour flag with the Charkha in the centre as the emblem of the Nation. On 18th March 1923, on Gandhi Day, the National Flag was hoisted on the building of the Jabalpur Municipality. The European Deputy Commissioner in high dudgeon ordered the flag to be pulled down, and the overzealous police not only took it down but trampled on it. This at once touched off an indignant agitation. The District Congress Committee started a Satyagraha, and Pandit Sunderlal, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Nathuram Modi and some volunteers took out a procession with the Flag, in defiance of the Deputy Commissioner's orders. The procession was stopped by the police and all the leaders were arrested. Upon this all the members of the Municipality resigned in a body as a protest. Pandit Sunderlal was tried and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. A miniature

which was on his person was forcibly seized against which as a protest he went on a fast for seventy-two hours while awaiting trial.

The high-handed action of the District authorities at Jabalpur provoked the people throughout the Province and the Nagpur Congress Committee took up the challenge. The "No-Changers" wing of the Congress, those who were firm believers in the path of non-co-operation, saw here a cause that was worth fighting for. An insult to the Flag is an insult to the Nation. It is the duty of the freedom-fighters to hold aloft the flag in the face of persecution. Here was an issue that would at once appeal to the popular imagination and serve as an excellent symbol of the struggle. It was decided to make Nagpur the centre of the struggle and the Mahakoshal Congress Committee sent their leaders to Nagpur. Jamanlal Bajaj took up the organization of the movement and the anniversary day of Jallianwalla Bagh tragedy, 13th April, was fixed as the date for inaugurating the Satyagraha. Meanwhile Government also, on their part, issued circulars to all Municipalities and District Councils in the Province instructing them not to hoist the National Flag on their buildings.

On 13th April a procession of thirty-six volunteers led by M. R. Awari and followed by a large crowd started from the city and marched towards the Civil Station. As soon as the procession reached the District Court Mr. Gowan, the District Magistrate, ordered it to be stopped. Then a batch of ten volunteers holding the Flag emerged from the company and went forward to court arrest. Before arresting them, however, the police beat them up mercilessly and then dragged them away. The leaders of the procession were also arrested, and all of them sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 60 or undergo two months' imprisonment. They all preferred the latter.

The fight had now begun in earnest. The Nagpur Congress Committee and the Mahakoshal Congress Committee jointly took counsel and decided to meet the challenge. On 1st May a group of volunteers under Jamanlal Bajaj and Shri Bhagwan Din started from the city carrying the National Flag, but when it reached the District Court it was stopped as before. Batches of six volunteers went forward and they were brutally handled and taken to the jail. Excitement steadily grew throughout the province, and interest was roused in other parts of the country as well. Volunteers began to pour into Nagpur from every district. A batch of three hundred volunteers came from Balaghat, smaller batches came from every

other district. Mr. Bourne, the Deputy Commissioner of Narsinghpur, tried hard to stop any volunteers going to Nagpur. He arrested the local leaders, and called together the malguzars and zamindars in the district and charged them to see that no volunteer went from there. In spite of all this a batch under Seth Kanhaiyalal managed to come from Narsinghpur. From Jabalpur came a large batch under Subhadra Kumari Chauhan and her husband Thakur Laxman Singh; another came from Sagau under Halve and Abdul Gani; from Betul came a batch under Seth Jethmal; from Banapura in Hoshangabad Thakur Kesar Singh brought a batch. Thus within a few days about a thousand volunteers had gathered at Nagpur, some having walked all the way, and the satyagraha was in full swing. The All-India Congress Committee, which was meeting in Bombay in the last week of May, took note of the fight that was taking place in Nagpur, and C. Rajagopalachariar moved a resolution "congratulating the volunteers of the Central Provinces on their satyagraha in defence of the National Flag at Nagpur, and calling upon all volunteers throughout the country to be ready to join the struggle when required."

For the first two months of the Satyagraha it was mainly a Provincial movement. From 1st May onwards every day small batches of volunteers would start off with the flag, would be arrested as soon as they entered the prohibited area, and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment. Every day crowds of spectators would assemble on the road-side to watch this striking but unequal contest between little groups of unarmed khadi-clad youths and the khaki-clad platoons of armed police. "A batch of volunteers is sighted; a signal is given and the magistrates and the policemen stiffen themselves up: as the volunteers came up, with serious faces, waving their flags high, they are quickly mopped up and marched off to the nearby District office, while the crowds give a thunderous cheer." This was the daily routine. It was all a solemn, deliberate ritual. There was no light-hearted frivolity or bravado about it.

After the close of the Bombay Session of the All-India Congress Committee many of the leaders including Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Devdas Gandhi and T. Prakasam came to Nagpur to see the progress of the struggle. They were impressed with the remarkable discipline and enthusiasm with which the movement was being conducted as well as with the worthiness of the cause. Dr. Ansari, the Congress President of the year, issued an appeal to all provinces to observe 18th June 1923 as All-India

Flag Day, and added that "Nagpur and Central Provinces have put up a noble fight in vindication of the honour of our National Flag. The affair is no longer a local one. Every Province must, therefore, do its share by enlisting volunteers and assisting in the struggle for the Flag at Nagpur". From now on the movement took an all-India complexion. From distant parts of the country volunteers began to pour into Nagpur. The slogan was "Nagpur *chalo*". In the city itself, to observe the Flag Day on 18th, a large procession was planned, with 101 volunteers and Jamanlal Bajaj at its head. But before this could take place, Jamanlal Bajaj, Bhagwan Din, Nilkanth Rao Deshmukh, who were the moving spirits of the Satyagraha, were arrested on 17th June and the police raided the volunteers' camp. But the movement progressed unaffected. The procession on the 18th was witnessed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Purushottam Das Tandon, Makhanlal Chaturvedi and other leaders. On that day 275 volunteers and prominent persons like Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Dr. Hardikar were arrested. As large batches of volunteers began to arrive from outside, the Commissioner of Nagpur posted police at the railway station and arrested on arrival those whom they thought to be volunteers. The result was that a large number of travellers who were clad in khadi but were otherwise not connected with the Movement, were subjected to considerable harassment. Questioned in the Legislative Council, Government said brazenly that "persons unable to give a satisfactory account of themselves were arrested under the Criminal Procedure Code". In this manner, by the end of July, as many as 219 persons had been arrested at the Nagpur railway station alone.

The All-India Congress Committee met at Nagpur on 9th July and the first resolution it considered was one on the Nagpur Satyagraha. Sarojini Naidu, who moved it, said that though it may have originated from a local grievance, the Satyagraha had now assumed a national aspect and they, as custodians of national honour, must congratulate the satyagrahis. "Small as the issue seemed, it was a token of their determination to give battle to the bureaucracy to maintain their elementary rights. In that struggle, they witnessed the spectacle of the oldest joining in, not to be outdone by the youngest in sacrifice". The reference was to the thrilling example of two young boys, fourteen years old, who distinguished themselves by their courage, persistence and patriotism in this struggle.

Mohan and Abhimanyu were in the forefront of the struggle. Mohan reached Nagpur soon after the struggle had started. He went to the volunteers' camp and begged to be taken as a satyagrahi. Mahatma Bhagwandin, seeing the tender



age of the boy, tried to dissuade him, but Mohan was adamant. When other leaders like Jamanlalji and C. Rajagopalachari argued with him he burst into tears and insisted on joining. At last he had to be permitted to offer satyagraha with the next batch. Bravely he went forward waving his flag. He was stopped by the police along with the rest of the batch, but though they did handle him roughly he was not arrested because of his age. The other lad, Abhimanyu, was equally persistent and the police treated him even more severely. He was so badly hurt by the police baton that he had to be taken to the hospital. But the moment he got well, he was back again, but this time he and Mohan were asked to work only in the Satyagraha office, which they did from 6 o'clock in the morning to almost midnight. Those who remember the stirring times will even now recollect the way these two boys led the chorus singing:

नहीं स्केगा, नहीं झुकेगा, कौनी झंडा कभी नहीं,  
भारत भू की राष्ट्रपताका झुक सकती क्या कभी कही!  
बीर शीस बत्तीस कोटि पर कौमी झंडा खड़ा हुआ,  
इसकी रक्षा हेतु वतन का बच्चा बच्चा अड़ा हुआ.

The women too were, for the first time, in the freedom struggle, in the forefront of the fight. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan had already played a brave part at Jabalpur with her husband Thakur Laxman Singh. They both came to Nagpur when that place became the centre of the struggle. For some time, considering the brutal treatment meted out to satyagrahis, she was not allowed to join the batches that offered themselves for arrest. But ultimately she had her way, and when she was arrested Rajagopalachari, who was in Nagpur, commented at a public meeting, "I hope you realise that a sister of ours is today under arrest. Why has she allowed herself to be taken in the custody of strangers and policemen, which no Hindu lady can contemplate with equanimity? If you consider about it, does it not mark a wonderful progress in our march to freedom? This brave act of Subhadradevi will be heard and felt in every home in India." There were other ladies too who made themselves conspicuous by their rare courage. One lady, whose three sons had already gone to prison, came with her daughter twelve years old, and insisted on sending her with a flag to offer satyagraha. Kasturba herself came to Nagpur and asked Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to include ladies also in the batches offering satyagraha: but the Sardar, who knew the ways of the police, decided that the time was not yet for the women of India to brave such peril.

A movement so determined and nation-wide, taking place almost at their door-steps, could not be ignored by the Legislative

Council which assembled in August 1923. By that time over 1,400 satyagrahis had been sent to jail with sentences ranging from one to six months of rigorous imprisonment. The largest numbers came from Nagpur, Balaghat and Wardha districts of the province. From outside the province, 150 volunteers of Bombay had been arrested and slightly smaller numbers from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, United Provinces and Madras. One of the arrested satyagrahis was from Nepal. On 7th August the Legislative Council discussed a Resolution moved by Seth Sheolal recommending to Government "that the order of the Deputy Commissioner of Nagpur applying Section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, be cancelled". It was this order that the Satyagrahis were defying. In the course of the debate it was pointed out that a procession in celebration of the Turkish Peace Treaty had been permitted to pass through those very prohibited streets on 25th July. It was only the procession of the Congress volunteers that the District Magistrate had objected to. For two days the Council debated the resolution and in spite of the efforts made by the official bloc and loyalists, it was passed, 31 voting for it and 26 against.

Meanwhile, reports of the inhuman treatment of the Satyagrahis in the jails of this province appeared in many all-India newspapers. Government on their side invited correspondents of some pro-Government newspapers of Bombay and Calcutta and, on the basis of the Government hand-outs, these published leading articles supporting the Government stand. Copies of these articles were purchased by Government and sent to local bodies and some individuals. But it was impossible to hide the fact that the volunteers who had been sent to jail were ill-treated. Rajagopalachari wrote in *Young India* quoting several instances of such brutal treatment. In these circumstances the Legislative Council debated another Resolution recommending to Government "that all volunteers and Congress workers imprisoned in connection with the national flag agitation be released unconditionally". This too was passed on 9th August with thirty-one members voting in its favour and twenty-seven against. Another resolution adopted by the Council recommended that all the pending prosecutions in this connection should be withdrawn.

The period for which the order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code had been passed was coming to an end on 17th August. Sardar Patel had already arrived in Nagpur to direct the fight for the National Flag. He was later joined by his illustrious brother V. J. Patel. The Provincial Government too had been rather shaken by the magnitude of the protest against their actions, the latest examples of which were the resolutions

which even the docile Legislative Council had chosen to adopt. Conversations were started between the Governor and the two leaders, Sardar Patel and V. J. Patel. There was much speculation about what transpired at these conversations. But the result, in any case, was that the order under section 144, which expired on 17th August, was allowed to lapse and was not renewed. A procession of a hundred volunteers carrying the National Flag was taken out on the 18th which was Gandhi Day. A press correspondent reporting this spectacle gave the following vivid account of it:

"It was a thrilling sight to see the big procession marching calmly in well-arranged ranks behind their Captain, Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi, who was specially sent today for Satyagraha at the head of the procession to meet any emergencies that might arise, owing to the new prohibitory order under the Police Act\* which had resulted in severe beating by the Police to the first flag procession on the fateful 13th of April, when several volunteers had been severely wounded and miserably dragged. All volunteers before starting were reminded of this event and their possible fate under police batons, but they were sturdy, brave young men who would not flinch. They were all dressed in white khadi and carried national flags in their hands whose newly dyed red and green along with the white stripes shining brilliantly under the clouded sky lent triumphant joy to the cheerful countenances of satyagrahis and the admiring crowd around. It was previously announced that no spectators were to go with the procession through the prohibited area. The vast crowd stopped still at the Jhanda bridge when requested by the Congress volunteers to do so.

"Slowly and silently the procession went over the bridge. In front of them were the familiar figures of young Mohan and Abhimanyu sweetly singing national songs, the same Abhimanyu who was severely beaten on the 13th April by a sturdy Sikh custodian of law and order. Amongst those who accompanied the procession were Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendraprasad, Shaukarlal Parekh, Shrimati Subhadrakumari, Vasudeo Rao Subhedar, Seth Punamchandji, Thakurs Lakshman Singh and Indra Singh. The procession crossed the bridge. There were about fifty policemen waiting with thick bomboo lathies in their hands and four Sub-Inspectors in command. The hearts of the spectators were throbbing as to what would happen. With bated breath they watched the procession more peacefully than ever, moving slowly forward. The police advanced. Would there be a beating? No. a few of them were ordered simply to keep the crowd away from

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\*The District Superintendent of Police had issued an order under section 30 of the Police Act that no procession should pass the Civil Lines without his permission.

accompanying the procession. The procession would be allowed to pass through the route announced by the Satyagraha Committee. Up rose the triumphant shout of "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", "Rashtriya Jhande Ki Jai". Satyagraha was victorious. Every face appeared to be happy over this. When the procession reached near the Church, the D. S. P. said to Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi : "Now, will you please honour the Church and stop music for that." "Most gladly" came the prompt reply. Music stopped till the Church premises were passed. The route lay round the Church. European ladies, gentlemen and children were watching the procession from their bungalows with face beaming with curiosity. After leaving the Church premises the procession passed to Sadar Bazaar which was outside the prohibited area and the police escort stopped at the boundary and retired. The procession dispersed in Sadar Bazaar according to the programme after a short speech by the Captain. The whole city was in a transport of joy at this happy termination of Satyagraha which lasted for three months and eighteen days and thanked God for the victory. In the evening a big public meeting was held in the Town Hall where Srijut Vallabhbhai Patel read his written statement declaring the closure of Satyagraha. The President, Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi, after thanking the workers closed the meeting amidst shouts of "Rashtriya Jhande Ki Jai".\*

Thus ended this remarkable episode in the Freedom Struggle which was unanimously admitted to be a striking success. The Special Session of the Congress which met at Delhi on 15th September recorded the success achieved at Nagpur. It was again Sarojini Naidu who moved hearty congratulations of the Congress to the organizers of the Flag Satyagraha movement at Nagpur and volunteers for having by their heroic sacrifice upheld the honour of the country by carrying the fight to a successful finish. At a time when the freedom struggle seemed to be at an ebb and those who clung firmly to the principle of non-co-operation and Satyagraha were left idle on the shore behind the retreating tide, the struggle in Nagpur gave new life to the resistance movement and helped to preserve the spirit of defiance.

### III

Meanwhile the life of the first Legislatures formed under the Reforms came to an end with the Monsoon Sitting of 1923. Tender farewell scenes marked the close of the C. P. Legislative Council on 14th August. Seth Sheolal, speaking in Hindi, expressed satisfaction at the work of the present Council "where people's

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\*Quoted by Mitra : Indian Annual Register, 1923, Vol. II.

voice has been clothed with substantial authority, in some departments at least. . . . It is now time that the scope of the reforms be widened so that our successors will be able to achieve much more than what we have succeeded in doing." The President of the Council, Sir Gangadhar Rao Chitnivis, while adjourning the Council said, "It is rumoured that some of the members may in the next Council come with a view to wreck the Councils." This "rumour" produced more violent reactions in the Viceroy. Speaking at a lavish and fulsome party given by Sir Mohamad Shafi at the Chelmsford Club, Simla, on 17th October 1923, Lord Reading chided the Swarajists who had declared that they would enter the Councils to wreck the constitution. He, of course, did not believe they could do it, but nevertheless warned them that if ever they should succeed, there would be a paralysis of Reformed Constitution. The Government were resourceful enough to meet the situation. It would only mean that they would revert to the pre-Reform era and "the blessings of the Montford Reforms would be withdrawn."

The Elections of 1923 were held in this atmosphere with petulant threats from the Government, arrogant defiance by the Services, vague apprehensions among those who had adorned the Councils after the first elections. The Special Session of the Congress held in Delhi with Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as President had adopted a Compromise Resolution moved by Maulana Mohamad Ali. It said:

"While reaffirming its adherence to the principle of Non-Violent Non-co-operation, this Congress declares that such Congressmen as have no religious or other conscientious objections against entering the legislature are at liberty to stand as candidates and to exercise their right of voting at the forthcoming elections and this Congress, therefore, suspends all propaganda against entering the Councils.

"This Congress at the same time calls upon all Congressmen to redouble their efforts to carry out the constructive programme of their great leader, Mahatma Gandhi, by united endeavour to achieve Swaraj at the earliest possible moment."

The Resolution was seconded by C. R. Das and was passed by an overwhelming majority. Thus fortified those members of the Congress, who chose the path of agitation through the legislatures, girded themselves for the elections. The pro-changes had their way and they were now called upon to show their mettle. They made their programme clear to the people in their Election Manifesto issued by the General Secretary, Pandit Motilal Nehru. They affirmed that they were an integral part of the Congress and

declared that the demand to be made by the members of their party on entering the Legislative Councils would be that the right of the people of India to control the existing machinery and system of Government shall be conceded forthwith. In the event of the Government refusing to entertain this demand, it would be the duty of the party to resort to a policy of "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction with a view to make Government through the Assembly and Councils impossible".

During the elections held in November, the only opposition that the Swarajist candidates had to face was from the Liberal Party which had largely filled the first Councils of 1921. This party had been considerably weakened by that experience. Besides the Liberals, a number of Independents contested the elections mainly on the strength of local influence. The results were, therefore, highly satisfactory to the Swarajists. The Central Provinces excelled all other provinces in the country being the only one to give the Swarajists a clear majority over all other parties. In a House of seventy members, forty-two seats were won by Swarajists. Among them were B. G. Khaparde, Dr. Moonje, Raghavendra Rao and Ravi Shanker Shukla. In other provinces, there were some conspicuous Liberal defeats, though the Swarajists did not get a clear majority. In Calcutta, Surrendranath Banerjea was defeated by Dr. B. C. Roy. C. R. Das was, of course, returned upopposed from Midnapore. In Bombay, Jaykar defeated Dr. Paranjpe, and in United Provinces, the former Minister C. Y. Chintamani suffered defeat. The Swarajists were able to win a little less than half the number of elected seats in the Central Legislature. This was, perhaps, inevitable because many of the constituencies were reserved for land-holders and other special interests. Nevertheless, the Assembly had a galaxy of patriotic leaders which changed the complexion of the House. There were Pandit Motilal Nehru, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, V. J. Patel, M. A. Jinnah, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Hans Raj. The members elected by Madhya Pradesh included M. V. Abhyankar, Dr. Hari Singh Gour and Shambu dayal Misra from the general constituencies, and Seth Govind Das to represent the Landholders' Constituency. The Muhammadan Constituency was represented by Shri Samiulla Khan. The two members from the State in the Council of State were Sir M. B. Dadabhoy and G. S. Khaparde. Out of a total strength of 140 members in the Legislative Assembly, the Swarajists had 45 seats. But they formed a disciplined and compact group; they counted among them some of the most brilliant minds in the country; and they were able to exert an influence upon the affairs of the Assembly far more powerful than what their numbers would suggest.

Meanwhile, the newly-elected Legislative Council in Central Provinces started on a sensational note. The Swarajists having won 45 out of the 54 elected seats in a House of seventy, the Governor invited Dr. Moonje, the leader of the Swarajists, to form a Ministry. Dr. Moonje promptly refused. Thereupon, the Governor nominated Shri Shankar Rao Chitnavis, who had been a Minister in the first Council, and Syed Hifazar Ali as Ministers. Explaining it, he said in his opening address, "In making the appointment of Ministers I was faced with the position that no member of the majority party was prepared to take office. Thus, they refused to accept the responsibility of their position. Some members classed as 'Independents' were also not prepared to accept office. The sphere of selection was thus narrowed.". There was a misstatement in the Governor's reference to the "responsibility of their position", because the Swarajists had clearly taken their position in the House for the "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction" of the Government. Therefore, their consent, not their refusal, to accept office would have been contrary to 'the responsibility of their position'. As an effective way to vindicate their stand, the Swarajists brought forward a motion of no-confidence against the Ministry, and on 18th January 1924, three days after the new Council began its first session, Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao moved "That a formal address be moved to His Excellency the Governor from this House submitting that the Hon'ble Ministers do not enjoy the confidence of the Council and he be pleased to dismiss them forthwith".

The mover's speech was a forceful and unanswerable denunciation of the whole procedure of the Governor and of the "two estimable gentlemen who have thought fit, without reference to majority or minority parties, to accept the moral and constitutional responsibility of running the transferred departments on behalf of the electorate and the legislature". Clarifying the stand of the Swarajist Party, he said:

"Now, Sir, the justifications that have been put forward for selecting the Ministers are two. It has been said that one of the ministership was offered to the majority party and because they refused it was offered to some independent members of this House. But so far as we know, His Excellency has not thought fit to communicate to us who these independent gentlemen were. That being so we have before us two gentlemen who have taken the responsibility of administering the transferred departments, because His Excellency has asked them to oblige this Government and carry on the King's Government. I know the King's Government has to be carried on. It has been carried on in this country for the last

150 years. In the Central Provinces it has been carried on ever since the Marathas were unjustly deprived of their power. . . . But it is perfectly open to us to tell any one not to carry it on in our name. We desire to tell them in unmistakable terms that we do not, and possibly cannot, accord our sanction to it so far as it rests on our responsibility. . . . It is often emphasised and it is likely to be emphasised again, that the Governor has appointed the Ministers because there were no other people willing to take up that office. But I reiterate and emphasise my point that the King's Government may be carried on but let it be carried on without the sanction of the Legislature. We say that the Ministers are not our real representatives in the Government much less of the electorate. We believe that this form of Government is not suitable to us and we do not want to give any opportunity to any one to form a mistaken notion that he is carrying on in the name of the Legislature. Let not people outside believe that we have lent our support to this form of Government."

The result of the motion was clear from the very beginning. The question was the thorough impropriety of the appointment of Ministers. As Pandit Shukla said, "The Swaraj Party, though in a majority in the House, was right in not accepting the responsibility of forming the Ministry. It will be not only wrong but immoral if we accepted ministerial responsibility and made ourselves a party to the perpetuation of these mock parliaments. But if the Swaraj Party refused to accept the responsibility, did it behove my hon'ble friends, admittedly not having the confidence of the House, to take upon themselves the task of running the administration"? The Legislature in Madhya Pradesh made history on that occasion, as it was the first no-confidence motion passed against a Government under the Reforms Act. It was the first triumph of the battle for freedom inside the Council Hall. As Raghavendra Rao said in his reply to the debate: "The first battle for responsible Government will be in the Central Provinces and the whole country is watching with feverish anxiety of results. . . . Indian Nationalism has awakened to the truth of eliminating certain evils as a preliminary to the attainment of Swaraj. That evil is the debasing domination of an alien and selfish Bureaucracy. Our first battle will be with the Bureaucracy and we have begun it." When the motion was put to the vote, 44 voted for it while 24 voted against it. The Swarajists, who on Congress platforms had for many months pressed the case for Council-entry, had now justified themselves by effectively bringing about a deadlock. They voted down every measure brought



up by Government. They refused the money bills. They reduced Minister's salary to two rupees a year. By every means they exposed the emptiness of the Reforms. Even the no-changers had to admit that in the Central Provinces at any rate Council-entry had been eminently successful in the purpose for which it was adopted.

The policy only needed to be endorsed by the nation's leader, Gandhiji, who was in Yeravada Jail. Just at this time the anxious news that he was ailing from acute appendicitis reached the nation. On 12th January 1924, he was rushed from the prison to the hospital. Colonel Maddock of Sassoon Hospital performed the operation. During the operation a thunderstorm cut off the supply of electricity. A flashlight was held by one of the nurses, and that too went out, and the operation had to be completed by the light of a hurricane lamp. But it was successful. Some years after, when Gandhiji was in England for the Round Table Conference, he made it a point to visit Colonel Maddock and his family in their home. While Gandhiji was in hospital, there was a country-wide demand for his release. He had already been in jail for twenty-two months out of six years' sentence. The nation had been without his guidance all these months. Now his health was in danger. For a wonder, Bombay Government relented, and on 5th February 1924, he was unconditionally released and was shifted to a seaside cottage at Juhu near Bombay for a period of convalescence. Here came Pandit Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das and posted him with all the vital changes that had taken place in the country during the last twenty-two months. The Hindu-Moslem relationship, a basic principle with Gandhiji, had deteriorated. The non-cooperation movement had come to a standstill. In these circumstances, the two leaders explained the policy behind the Swarajist wing of the Congress. Gandhiji listened to them patiently. Ultimately, the statement issued by Gandhiji on 22nd May 1924 from Juhu substantially supported the Congress and Swarajist position as it then stood: "The Swarajists are justified in entering the Legislative bodies and expecting perfect neutrality on the part of the 'No-changers'. If the work of the Swarajists prospers the country benefits; such an ocular demonstration cannot but convince honest sceptics like me of our error; and I know the Swarajists to be patriotic enough to retrace their steps when experience has disillusioned them." On that basis the question 'to change or not to change' was settled for the moment.

### CHAPTER III

#### COUNCILS AND CLASHES

We have seen how the elections of 1923 brought the Swarajists in substantial strength in the Provincial Councils and the Central Assembly. The New Year brought a significant change in British politics also. The Conservative Prime Minister Baldwin had resigned in November 1923 and decided to ask for the dissolution of Parliament and General Elections on the question of Free Trade. The result was that no single party returned with a clear majority after the Elections. Labour being numerically the largest, was asked to form Government; and thus in January 1924 Ramsay Macdonald formed his first Cabinet. It was hopefully expected in some quarters in our country, especially by the Liberals, that a new era would now dawn in Indo-British relation. The leaders of the Labour Party, including Macdonald himself had all been good friends of India, and now that they had the opportunity to suit their actions to their professions, it was confidently hoped that they would do the right thing by India. But the first set-back to such hopes came when Lord Olivier, instead of Col. Wedgewood, was appointed Secretary of State for India. This was followed by Ramsay Macdonald's Message to India, which Baldwin himself would have been happy to pronounce: "No party in Great Britain will be cowed by threats of force or by policies designed to bring Government to a standstill; and if any sections in India are under the delusion that that is so, events will very sadly disappoint them." It was clear that India could expect nothing from that quarter.

The Swarajists who had chosen the legislatures as their field of battle were as good as their word. We have seen their success in Madhya Pradesh. In the Central Legislative Assembly they had a brilliant array of leaders. Within a few days of the opening of the Session Pandit Motilal Nehru, the leader of the party, was able to establish a working agreement with those nationalist members who had been elected as Independents, so as to vote jointly on agreed issues. He was thus able to carry by an overwhelming majority, on 8th February, this challenging Resolution: "This Assembly recommends to the Governor-General-in-Council to take steps to have the Government of India Act revised with a view to establish full responsible Government for India, and for the said purpose: (a) to summon at an early date representatives to a Round Table Conference to recommend, with due regard for the protection

of the rights and interests of the important minorities, a Constitution for India; and (b) after dissolving the Central Legislature, to place the said scheme before a newly elected Indian Legislature, and submit the same to the British Parliament to be embodied in a Statute." Those who eloquently supported included M. A. Jinnah and Pandit Malaviya. In spite of the obvious efforts made by Sir Malcolm Hailey, the Home Member, to cause dissensions between the Swarajists on the one hand and the Independents and Liberals on the other, the Resolution of Motilal Nehru was carried by 76 votes against 48—the first success of the Swarajists. They followed this up by throwing out the entire Budget Demand for 1924-25. Among those who supported the motion to refuse the Demand was M. V. Abhyankar who pointed out the well-established doctrine of redress of grievances before grant of supplies. Item after item was put to vote and thrown out amidst scenes of great excitement. Thus the Assembly repeated the scene in the Central Provinces Legislative Council. The Governor-General, no doubt, "certified" all the demands, but the people's representatives had demonstrated their opposition.

The events in Madhya Pradesh took a dramatic turn. The Budget having been thrown out and the Ministers' salary reduced to two rupees a year, there was nothing left for the Governor to do but to accept the resignations of the Ministers and certify the rejected Demands. But in doing so he made it clear that the expenditure in regard to the "reserved" subjects was being certified in full, but in the "transferred" departments he had restored only the amount required for meeting the committed expenditure. He could not authorise any new items of expenditure. Government made much of this point in order to discredit the Swarajists party among the people; but in actual fact the certified expenditure amounted to Rs. 521 lakhs as against a budgeted expenditure of Rs. 529 lakhs, showing a reduction only of 1.5 per cent. What mattered to the Government was not the amount of the reduction, but the fact that the Government could now use the Swarajist 'intransigence' as a scape-goat for all the imperfections in the administration.

A curious campaign now began, and Government set in motion a blatant propaganda through pamphlets, lectures, insidious suggestions and official pressure, in order to malign the Swarajists. It was curious because the bureaucracy was attempting to influence the electorate and the general public direct as if it were a political party fighting an election. They had no compunction about using the local Government officials for this purpose. A circular letter to all

officers in the districts was issued by the Chief Secretary to Government on 1st April 1924 giving them "instructions regarding the measures to be taken in order to bring home to the electorate, as far as possible, the effect of the obstructive policy followed by the Swaraj party in the Legislative Council." It is necessary to quote this circular at some length because it shows how the bureaucracy, when it suited their purpose, countenanced a type of activity by the permanent services which was obviously of a political nature. In the circular they were at some pains to point out that at the actual time of the elections, no partnership should be shown. But it is too naive to imagine that a propaganda so intensively carried on till the eve of an election will not predispose the minds of people a few days later. The Chief Secretary's circular said :

"It will be observed that whilst Government servants may not interfere or use their influence in election to the Legislative Council and should, as far as possible, refrain from making any reference to personalities or parties or individuals, they are at liberty to defend and explain in public the policy of the Government to remove misapprehensions, correct mis-statements and refute disloyal and seditious propaganda. The broad aspects of the effects of the policy of obstructive action of the Swaraj party members in the Legislative Council have been stated in the speech of his Excellency the Governor at Khandwa on the 26th March last, an extract from which has already been issued as Publicity Leaflet No. 97. This should form the basis of propaganda to be conducted in your district. In addition, certain vernacular leaflets have already been distributed and it is proposed to issue others from time to time. It is for you to decide the most suitable distribution of these leaflets in accordance with instructions given.

'If any officer desires to obtain other particular publication or special information on any particular point, he should address the Chief Secretary who will endeavour to meet the demand.

'Whilst distribution of such leaflets may serve a useful purpose, the local Government believes that the spoken word is a more powerful influence than the written word. I am therefore to state that you and your subordinates should give special attention to this matter of oral explanation. It should be regarded as one of the most important duties to discuss the present situation at evening meetings with villagers in camp. In addition, arrangements should be made to hold special meetings or small darbars at tahsil headquarters and other suitable centres. Such action may be best taken by you and sub-divisional officers, and if you consider that selected

tahsildars can be similarly employed, you should take action accordingly. If you desire also assistance of selected officers of other departments, you are authorised to make your arrangements direct with them.

‘Whilst such propaganda by Government officers may be expected to help to bring home to the electorate the evil effects of the action of the Swaraj party, it is most desirable that similar propaganda should be undertaken by non-official organisations or other non-official agency willing to undertake such work, by provision of material for propaganda and such other assistance as may suggest itself.’

The leaflets that were distributed in tens of thousands were gems of official inanities. One was called “Does the Swaraj Party deserve the country’s confidence?” It was so gross and absurd that even the Moderates whom this kind of campaign was expected to benefit, were ashamed of it. Among the wise pronouncements it contained were: “When the British came they found the people ignorant, oppressed and frightened”. It went on, “Those who tell you that men were happy in those days are liars”. The whole thing was so puerile that it is a matter of wonder that any Government could ever seriously sponsor it. But not only was this sponsored but was carried out with all-consuming zeal by some district officers like Mr. Bourne in Narsinghpur. In the Legislative Council in the following year Pandit R. S. Shukla exposed his misdoings in a strong Resolution of condemnation. Pandit Shukla narrated the questionable and mischievous activities of this officer who had started an open campaign against the Swarajists. Mr. Bourne published a paper called “Narasimha” which printed most poisonous articles directed against the Congress and the Swarajists. “The darbars like those held at Gadarwara in which Mr. Bourne moved from place to place like a Grand Mughal, the huge subscriptions collected and wasted, the incentives given for terrorising and looting the people, the constant persecution of leading non-cooperators and pleaders—all these had made Bourne’s administration of Narsinghpur the blackest spot in British India.” Similar candid exposures of official antics were made in the debate by Dr. Raghavendra Rao and Ghanshyam Singh Gupta. Although Bourne alone got the lime-light, there were numerous others in every district who were carrying on the same kind of political propaganda in even cruder forms.

The Governor, Sir Frank Sly, himself gave the lead in his speeches at Malkapur, Hoshangabad and Jabalpur. His policy was

to rally the land-holding and aristocratic classes round the Government to fight the nationalists. He excelled himself in this effort in his address to the Darbaris at Hoshangabad on 2nd December 1924 when he foretold a reversion to Pindari regime if the British went away: "Is there not a real danger that Swaraj, if it is prematurely grasped without the co-operation of the British, will result once more in anarchy and confusion? Irresponsible political theorists are the chief cause of the present unrest, and it is for you to know how short is the time since you escaped from the horrors of the Pindari oppression."! This round of execrations of the Congress went on till the beginning of 1925, and he concluded it with a final Durbar on 10th January at Nagpur where he announced that the Legislative Council would be summoned once more and another opportunity given to it to work the Constitution. But he was not there to bring about this change. On 25th January Sir Montagu Butler took office as Governor from Sir Frank Sly.

In the meanwhile the Constitution itself had suffered a scathing denunciation from a quarter least expected by Government. The evidence given by the Ministers who held office under the Constitution, before the Muddiman Committee was a severe blow. *Et tu Brute*. Among the first witnesses examined by the Committee early in August 1924 were Shankar Rao Chitnavis and N. K. Kelkar of Balaghat who had been Ministers in Central Provinces after the first elections. They both roundly condemned the system of dyarchy and gave instances to show how the ministers had been, time after time, by-passed by the bureaucracy who had direct access to the Governor. If a Minister passed an order which the Director of Public Instruction did not like, the latter would go to the Governor who readily over-ruled the Minister. Dr. Sapru, one of the members of the committee, asked N. K. Kelkar, "Will you like to mend dyarchy or end it", to which the prompt reply, born of three years of bitter experience was, "I would end it because it cannot be mended".

In two directions the events of 1924 were heading towards a crisis. The first was in regard to communal relations, to be dealt with later. For the present it is sufficient to point out that a series of communal clashes that occurred at Delhi, Gulburga (in Hyderabad State), Kohat, Nagpur, Jabalpur, Lucknow and Allahabad appeared to suggest that there was some method behind this madness. Bureaucracy knew that communal unity was the greatest danger to British domination. As long as the Khilafat issue was

alive it was impossible for the British to win over any section of Muslims in India. But with the repudiation of the Caliph by Turkey, and the subsequent exile of the Sultan from Turkey in March 1924, the cause of the Khilafat found its very foundation lost. It was, therefore, possible now for Government to play one section of the Muslim against the Khilafat group. The succession of communal clashes furthered this object.

It was a situation that irresistably summoned Gandhiji to action. Having acquiesced in the Swarajist policy of entering councils, he had confined himself to three basic pursuits which were vital to the freedom of the country : promotion of spinning, Hindu-Muslim unity and the abolition of untouchability. Now one of these fundamental factors was threatened. On 29th May 1924, he published in *Young India* a masterly 6,000-word article on "Hindu-Muslim Tension, its Causes and Cure". His main theme was that this tension was man-made and, therefore, it should be cured by man. It was not only man-made but was a disease of the middle-class urban society. It can be solved if the better spirit of man is roused. And so in the house of Mohammad Ali at Delhi on the 18th September 1924, Gandhiji entered on a 21-days fast. In the next Chapter we shall see the results that flowed from this penance.

The other direction in which events deteriorated was the growth of Governmental repression. It coincided with the change in British policy. The Labour Ministry of Ramsay Macdonald had carried on an uneasy existence since January, not daring to do anything which might alienate either of the other two parties with whose support it was possible to survive. Ultimately in October 1924 Macdonald decided to appeal to the electorate. Parliament was dissolved and fresh elections were ordered. But the result was disastrous for the Labour Party. They were heavily defeated and had to resign, being succeeded by the Baldwin Government with Lord Birkenhead, a brilliant, dominating and reactionary person, as Secretary of State for India. On the 25th October Lord Reading issued the notorious Bengal Ordinance which contained all the obnoxious features of the deceased Rowlatt Act. The excuse was that some attempts at bomb outrage and violence had been detected, and the murder of a British officer had taken place in Calcutta. That was enough to let loose upon Bengal a reign of terror. The day the Ordinance was issued, police raids took place in every street of the Hindu area of the city. About sixty houses were forcibly entered by the police parties.

Among the forty or more prominent persons arrested on that day was Subhas Chandra Bose. The Swaraj Party's office was raided and all books and papers were carried away. Similar searches were carried out in numerous other towns in Bengal and although over a hundred persons were arrested, the police were not able to discover a single revolver, any other arms or explosives which were really what they were after. All over India the voice of protest was raised against this orgy of repression. Gandhiji described it as the "Viceregal Bomb". The one good result it had was the cementing of political parties, and the forging of a united front to resist oppression. This was effected in the All-Party Conference held in Bombay on the 21st November. It brought together the Swarajists and the no-changing Congressmen together in an understanding embodied in the Calcutta Pact. By this agreement, to which Gandhiji, C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru were parties, the Congress suspended the Non-co-operation programme except in so far as boycott of foreign cloth was concerned, and endorsed the agitation inside the Councils by the Swaraj Party. It was thus an acknowledgment of the good work that the Swaraj Party had done in fighting the country's cause in the Councils, and it thereafter became the parliamentary wing of the Congress. This was endorsed by the Belgaum Session of the Congress presided over by Mahatma Gandhi himself.

Unfortunately while this unity was being forged on one side a schism was steadily appearing within the ranks of the Swarajists. It began to appear conspicuously in the Marathi districts of both Madhya Pradesh and Bombay. The Executive Committee of the Swarajist party met at Nagpur on the 11th and 12th January 1925, soon after Sir Frank Sly, the Governor of Central Provinces had made his speech about giving "a further opportunity" to the Swarajists for working the Constitution. The Committee reiterated the policy to obstruct Government unless suitable changes are made in the Constitution to make the administration popular and responsible. But soon after the Legislative Council met in March 1925, it became apparent that the astuteness of the new Governor, Sir Montagu Butler, was able to seek and create cracks in the solid wall of the Swarajist party. The election of S. B. Tambe, the Swarajist candidate, as President was hailed as a victory of the party. This was followed by talks between the Governor on the one hand and Dr. Rao, Dr. Munje and B. G. Khaparde on the other, on the subject of forming a Ministry. It was decided that the sense of the House should be taken by putting the demand for Ministers' salaries to vote. But the vote was adverse, and there the matter appeared to end.



In this posture of events the nation was plunged in sorrow by the sudden death of Deshbandhu Das on the 16th June 1925. Only a month before he had made a remarkable statement at the Faridpore Conference, regarding the stand of the Swaraj Party, and Gandhiji remarked after the Deshbandhu's death, "Faridpore was his crowning triumph. That utterance of his is a demonstration of his supreme reasonableness and statesmanship". The General Council of the Swaraj Party approved the position as expounded by their late leader at Faridpore, and while ready to offer honourable co-operation to Government, they found the existing situation not favourable for any change of policy.

The first sign of a split in the Swaraj Party occurred on the 8th October 1925, when S. B. Tambe decided to accept the membership of the Executive Council in Central Provinces in the vacancy caused by the retirement of Sir M. V. Joshi. This at once had a nation-wide reaction, and served to demarcate that section of the Swaraj Party which had steadily been drifting towards a revision of its policy inside the Councils. In Bombay M. R. Jayakar and N. C. Kelkar supported S. B. Tambe's action. On the 26th October the Executive Committee of the Berar Swaraj Party passed a Resolution declaring that the time had come for the Swaraj Party to adopt a policy of Responsive Co-operation. It was becoming clear that the opinion in Maharashtra and Berar had clearly diverged from the Swarajist stand. The position was so serious that an urgent meeting of the All-India Swarajist Executive Committee was called at Nagpur on the 1st November. Motilal Nehru had a frank and final conference with Dr. Munje and other leaders of the Responsivist group. It resulted in a complete breach. Motilal Nehru, rather bitterly, remarked that, "Maharashtra was a diseased limb of the Swaraj Party and he was quite prepared to amputate it". He followed this up with a hurricane tour of Wardha, Berar and Chanda. Speaking at Amravati he said that "the phrase responsive co-operation had no meaning in the prevailing situation. If it had any reference to the response to be made by the Government, no such response had yet been made and the acceptance of office could by no stretch of imagination be included in Responsive Co-operation under the existing circumstances". In fact, as Dwaraka Prasad Mishra said during the electioneering campaign of the next year, Responsive Co-operation was a case of running with the hare and hunting with the hound.

The decision of the All-India Executive of the Swaraj Party to stand firm on the policy of non-acceptance of offices and obstruction within the Councils did not stop further defections.

M. R. Jayakar and N. C. Kelkar resigned from the party, and this was followed by the resignation of Dr. Munje. The Maharashtra Swaraj Party met at Poona on the 29th November and endorsed their action and the policy of Responsive Co-operation.

When the Congress met at Cawnpore in December 1925 under the Presidentship of Sarojini Naidu, these differences came to a head. The main Resolution moved by Pandit Motilal Nehru stated the Swarajist position and proposed a course of action within the Councils. It proposed that the Swarajist members in the Central Assembly and in the Provincial Councils should throw out the Finance Bills in the ensuing Budget Sessions, and should thereafter walk out of the House and refrain from taking part in the subsequent days of the Session. The Congress should then fight the General Elections of 1926 on the issue of non-acceptance of offices. Opposition to this Resolution came from Pandit Malaviya and M. R. Jayakar. The latter made a dramatic announcement that he, N. C. Kelkar and Dr. Moonje had resigned their seats in their respective Provincial Councils because of their disagreement with the Swarajist policy in the legislature. M. V. Abyankar had a dig at Dr. Moonje saying that "he was glad that Mr. Jayakar had dragged Dr. Moonje into the open". After a lively debate Motilal Nehru's Resolution was carried by a large majority.

The general elections were to take place in October 1926. Therefore, the concluding sessions of the legislatures in the spring of 1926 had an added interest as a preparation for an appeal to the electorate. The Central Provinces Legislative Council met on the 4th March. Earlier, the Responsivists of Berar had declared themselves opposed to the Cawnpore Congress Resolution. At a conference held at Akola on the 14th February with M. R. Jayakar as President they had formed a new party to be called the Responsive Co-operation Party. Among the Secretaries of the Party were B. G. Khaparde and Dr. M. R. Cholkar. Thus when the Legislative Council met there was a cleavage in the ranks of the opposition. Nevertheless, there was no doubt about the fate of the budget presented by the Finance Member, J. T. Martin. Thakur Chhedilal opened the attack in the general debate, while Ghanshyam Singh Gupta moved a reduction of the Ministers' salaries to two rupees. The motion for reduction was passed by thirty-eight voting for the motion and fifteen against. Then Dr. Raghavendra Rao rose and made a statement in the course of which he said, "a mandate has been issued by the All-India Congress Committee of the Indian National Congress that members of the Swaraj Party should no longer take part in the

discussions of the budget. Therefore, in pursuance of the policy dictated by the All-India Congress Committee, I propose that the Swaraj Party in this council, which is pledged to that mandate, should take no further part in the discussion of the budget. I desire that the members of the Party should walk out of the House." Thereafter all the Swarajist members led by Dr. Raghavendra Rao rose and walked out. Only three Responsivists and a few Independents and Liberals remained behind. The legislature had been reduced to a farce, and Government decided that it was the better part of wisdom to prorogue the Council rather than continue in a truncated form.

The scene in the Central Assembly was even more dramatic. On the day the demands for budget grants came up for discussion Motilal Nehru, the Swarajist party leader, made an impressive statement criticising the repeated and consistent refusal of Government to pay any regard to the demand for constitutional reforms which the Assembly had voted for. He concluded indignantly saying, "we have no further use for these sham institutions, and the least we can do to vindicate the honour and self-respect of the nation is to get out of them and go back to the country for work in the country. We hope and trust that the nation will give a suitable reply and will send us again in large numbers, with a stronger mandate, and God willing, we shall fulfil its aspirations and enforce its demands". He sat down amidst applause, and immediately after, he and all the Swarajist members rose in a body and walked out of the House. This was followed by a significant observation by the President of the Legislative Assembly, Shri V. J. Patel which was characteristic of the dignity, independence and patriotism with which he clothed that office. He pointed out how after the withdrawal of the largest party from the House it had ceased to be representative in the sense in which it was intended to be by the Act. Therefore, during the period the House continued in this form, he said, "I would advise the Government to bring forward only such business as is absolutely necessary for the purpose of carrying on the administration, and not to bring forward any controversial measures. The Chair has a duty to see that the machinery of the Government of India Act is not abused to the prejudice of the people of this country." The tenure of Vithalbhai J. Patel as the President of the Central Assembly is a bright episode during the dreary period of dyarchy. In a later context we shall have occasion to deal with his conspicuous achievement in this office during the life-time of the next Assembly.

In April 1926, Lord Reading relinquished his office as Viceroy. Before quitting he was responsible for enacting one beneficent legislation, namely, the abolition of the Excise duty on Indian mill-made cloth. The cotton industry had been badly hit by depression since 1924, and this was a measure of relief calculated to placate the Indian textile interests. Lord Irwin who succeeded Reading as Viceroy, was by temperament and in outlook very different from his predecessor. An orthodox and pious Christian, he preferred, on the day of his landing in India, it being Good Friday, to go to Church rather than attend a reception in his honour. His arrival coincided with the outbreak of fierce communal violence in Calcutta and some other parts of India. The tragic legacy of these internecine feuds was destined to dog the nation's future for many years with disastrous results. Elsewhere in this narrative these results have been described at length. But in 1926 these feuds were to have an effect upon the General Elections scheduled to take place towards the end of the year.

On the 20th April 1926, as a result of the dead-lock caused by the withdrawal of the Swarajist Party from the Central Provinces Legislative Council, dyarchy was suspended in the Province. Thereafter the parties began to marshal their forces to fight the next elections. The Responsive-Co-operators had already declared their policy. It resulted in the breaking away of the Moonje-Aney group from the Abhyankar-Wamanrao Joshi group in the Marathi-speaking districts. Similarly Dr. Raghavendra Rao formed, in the Hindi-speaking areas, an Independent Congress Party. He issued a statement defining the policy of the new party, saying that "if, after elections, the response made by the Government is satisfactory, and if power or responsibility and initiative necessary for the effective discharge of their duties are secured to Ministers, we shall consider the response on its merits". Dr. Raghavendra Rao resigned from the Swaraj party, and set up his own party candidates in opposition to the Congress. Another important group which fought the elections in Berar was the Non-Brahmin party which contested seven out of the seventeen Berar seats. Thus on the eve of the general elections of 1926 the strong and solid Swaraj Party underwent a break-up. The worsening communal relations during the past two years had also driven some Congressmen into orthodox Hindu parties, such as the Hindu Mahasabha. It is, therefore, no wonder that the general elections resulted in a serious diminution in the Swarajist strength in the Central Assembly and in most of the Provincial Legislatures. In Central Provinces Council the number fell from

forty-four to fifteen. These fifteen Congressmen consisted of four Berar and Marathi Central Provinces members and eleven members from Mahakhosal. Whereas in Mahakhosal the candidates set up by the so-called Independent Congress Party of Dr. Raghavendra Rao were all routed by the Congress, the Responsivists in Berar succeeded in winning a number of seats. In the Central Assembly there were only about forty Congress members. Madhya Pradesh sent Dr. B. S. Moonje, Dr. Hari Singh Gour and Pandit Dwarka Prasad Mishra from the general constituencies and M. S. Aney from Berar. The land-holders' constituency was represented by Seth Jamnadas, while the Muhammadan constituency returned Abdul Kadir Siddique from Burhanpur. In the Council of State the two members from Madhya Pradesh were Seth Govind Das and G. S. Khaparde.

A little before the elections Indian opinion was greatly agitated by the Report of Currency Commission which recommended the stabilisation of the Rupee at 1 sh. 6 d., instead of the former rate of 1 sh. 4 d. Government accepted the recommendation and a bill was introduced on that basis. There was country-wide protest against the measure, as the immediate effect of the higher ratio would be to encourage imports and adversely affect the Indian export Trade. Especially in the case of imported cotton goods there would be a distinct advantage to Lancashire at the expense of Indian textile industry. The result, in other words, was to neutralise the advantages of the abolition of the excise duty in December 1925. It also had the effect of reducing the value of India's sterling holdings. Thus one of the major issues before the country on the eve of elections was the opposition to this measure. The Congress session held at Gauhati on the 26th December 1926, voiced these grievances of the people. S. Srinivasa Iyengar, the President, referred to the currency question and pointed out how the higher rate of exchange was bound to result in gross injustice to our industries, agriculture and export trade.

The Gauhati session met at a time when the split in the Congress had, to some extent, affected its position in the provincial legislatures. The result was a stiffening of the Congress attitude towards office acceptance. It resolved to refuse any office which was in the gift of the Government until Government responded satisfactorily to the National Demand, and to throw out all proposals for legislative enactment calculated to consolidate the power of the bureaucracy. This session of the Congress, in fact, set the tone for the policy of the Congress members in the legislatures

for the next three years. The Gauhati session was, however, overcast by the shadow of the outrageous murder of Swami Shradhanand at Delhi three days before the Session began. Mahatma Gandhi moved a touching resolution on the opening day of the Congress paying a tribute to the "brave and noble patriot who dedicated his life and his great gifts to the service of his country and of his faith, and espoused with fearless devotion the cause of the lowly, the fallen and the weak."

With the beginning of the year 1927 which saw the newly elected councils in the provinces and the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi getting to grips with the bureaucracy, a new phase in the clashes within the Councils began. Of the three Legislatures that were formed under the Reforms of 1919 this last was the stormiest. The proceedings in the Central Assembly, and to a lesser extent in the Provincial Councils steadily built up the national tempo. The spirit of the people was uplifted by the debating battles on the floor of the House. In the years 1927 and after we saw the unusual spectacle of the stream of the national movement being fed and strengthened by the incidents inside the legislatures, rather than the events in the wider public life of the country contributing to the strength of the Legislative front.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE COMMUNAL BREACH

That the communal conflicts were the results of political causes rather than religious is clear from the fact that whenever there was a common political programme leading to a united political struggle the differences between Hindus and Muslims vanished into thin air. Thus, in 1916, when the Congress and the Muslim League put forward a joint demand for constitutional reforms they were able to bring about the Lucknow Pact. Again, when they launched a political struggle relating to the Khilafat and Non-co-operation Movement all the differences between the two communities disappeared and they became comrades in a common struggle. But by 1922 the Non-co-operation Movement was withdrawn. In November 1922, the Sultan of Turkey was deposed though he remained Khalif, but next year Mustafa Kamal Pasha declared Turkey a Republic, and in March 1924 the Khilafat itself was abolished. The Sultan, Mohamad VI, was banished from Turkey and died two years later at San Remo. Thus, the Indian Muslims found themselves in an anomalous position of loyally espousing Khilafat when the Turks themselves had done away with it.

With the decline of the Khilafat Movement and the withdrawal of Non-co-operation the bonds that held the Hindus and Muslims together began to give way. The Britishers in India, who had watched the erstwhile fraternisation between the two communities with ill-repressed dismay, found now the situation favourable for their favourite game of 'divide and rule'. They could strew in their midst quite a few apples of discord in the shape of places of power and wealth, ministership, memberships of the Executive Councils, places in the legislatures, and even jobs in the Government offices, at a time when Government services were the only occupation that the educated middle class could seek. One of the signatories to the Lucknow Pact, Mian Fazl-i-Husain, had been made a Minister in the Punjab, and he put the office to good purpose by giving 50 per cent of the jobs to Muslims. After all, was not that percentage agreed to in the Lucknow Pact? No wonder that some members of the Muslim community began to feel that the tangible benefits under the Reforms were preferable to the problematic advantages that Non-co-operation might bring.

The birth of a communal riot is one of the strangest mysteries of British rule in India. No one has ever been able to say precisely



where and how and why a particular communal clash took place. The sky may be perfectly blue and serene ; one moment the pulse of life may beat even and smooth ; and then suddenly, no one knows how, a tension is sensed in the air, a foreboding of evil to come. Vague rumours rise up like pestilential fumes from the caverns of suspicion and hatred. And then something trivial happens. A stone from nowhere is thrown at a procession, a mysterious piece of unclean flesh is found inside a mosque, somewhere a cow is killed, or a band plays music in front of a mosque—and suddenly a riot flares up. All the missiles and other weapons of offence—spears, brickbats, daggers—come promptly where they are needed, and for some time, ranging from a few hours to a few days, an orgy of violence is enacted. When things have reached a certain pitch the long arm of law and order stretches out ; truck-loads of armed police, and in graver moments, even the military arrive. There is an adequate show of force, and the required number of persons from both communities are seized and carried away in the waiting police wans. Quiet descends once again. This was practically the identical drama that was enacted repeatedly all over the country. In 1923, Amritsar, Multan and parts of the Punjab saw it in March and April. Similar events happened in May in Sind and again in Amritsar. In June and July there were such riots in Moradabad, Meerut, in the Allahabad district, and in Ajmer. In August and September it was the turn of Agra, Panipat, Jabalpur and Rai Bareilly. During Moharrum in that year it was Sahranpur that gave another exhibition of this senseless feud. And so it went on, with revealing similarity, with predestined regularity and fatal consequences to the unity and progress of the country. Authority appeared to chuckle with satisfaction. The official report entitled "India in 1922-23" published by Government observes with ill-concealed glee that the claim of national unity so boldly advanced in the past by the Congress had been proved premature by the clashes that had taken place, and goes on to expatiate on the benevolent and kindly part played by the police in restoring order.

The fact is, India was beginning to reap the unblest harvest of the policy that began with Minto-Morley Reforms which had sown the seeds of conflict in the form of communal electorates. This segregation of the two communities at the very foundations of the political life inevitably produced a poisonous atmosphere of suspicion and discord. Rival candidates within each community were made to vie with one another in communal zeal. Thus, the virus spread to the common people, the voters of the two communities who,

blinded by passion, failed to see the overwhelming identity of their interests. As soon as the compulsions of a common dynamic struggle disappeared, they became easy game in the hands of the ruling power which welcomed with relish the chance to play one against the other.

When Gandhiji was unconditionally released from jail in 1924 the spectacle of communal hatred that he saw in the country filled him with anguish. He devoted the whole issue of *Young India* of 29th May 1924 to a long and searching analysis of the Hindu-Moslem tension. His views on the reservation of jobs for different communities are significant. He wrote:

“For administration to be efficient, it must be in the hands of the fittest. There should certainly be no favouritism. If we want five engineers we must not take one from each community but we must take the fittest five even if they are all Moham-madans or all Parsis. . . . The educationally backward communities will have a right to favoured treatment in the matter of education at the hands of the national Government. . . . But those who aspire to occupy responsible posts in the Government of the country can only do so if they pass the required test.”.

But such logic could not appeal to the minds clouded by self-interest.

1924 was a particularly bad year for communal troubles. It began in Delhi during Bakr-Id when some Moslems insisted on taking a procession of cows destined for slaughter through a street in a Hindu area. For a few days panic and unrest continued and in the clashes many were killed or wounded. On the same day similar clashes occurred in Nagpur, Jabalpur and a few other places in Madhya Pradesh. One of the worst outbreaks was at Gulbarga in Hyderabad where practically all the temples were desecrated and idols broken. An incident even more violent than the Gulbarga riots occurred at Kohat on the 9th and 10th September, which was touched off by some verses published and circulated by a Muslim writer and a Hindu writer, each calculated to hurt the susceptibilities of the other community. The comparatively small Hindu population of Kohat had to flee the town. Arson, loot and murder raged unchecked for a few days. Evil tidings have a way of spreading fast; the tragedy of Kohat reverberated in other cities of India. First Lucknow and then Shahjahanpur, and Allahabad witnessed the horrible drama, the main features of which revealed a sickening similarity. The waves of the orgy touched the northern parts

of Madhya Pradesh. On the day of the Dussera procession in 1924, Sagar was in the grip of communal tension. The combined Ramlila and Kali procession in Jabalpur was attacked while it was passing in front of a mosque.

The sorry tale of all these insane feuds and mutual destruction oppressed with heavy burden the heart of one man more than any other. Gandhiji was not yet wholly recovered from the illness following the operation. But the call of duty was irresistible: he could not see the most sacred ties that bind the nation, the Hindu-Muslim unity which was with him an article of fundamental value, being violently torn asunder. On 18th September 1924, he started a twenty-one-day fast in the house of Mohammad Ali at Delhi. In a statement issued on that day he said, "The recent events have proved unbearable for me. My helplessness is still more unbearable. My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot remove, one must fast and pray. I have done so in connection with my own dear ones. Nothing evidently that I say or write can bring the two communities together. I am, therefore, imposing on myself a fast of twenty-one days commencing from today and ending on Wednesday, the 8th October. . . . As a penance I need not have taken the public into confidence. But I publish the fast as (let me hope) an effective prayer both to Hindus and Mussalmans who have hitherto worked in union, not to commit suicide. I respectfully invite the heads of all the communities, including Englishmen, to meet and end this quarrel which is disgrace to religion and humanity".

The appeal had a great effect on the situation. Troublemakers were silenced by a sense of shame. Prayers were offered in mosques and temples. Invitations were telegraphically issued to over two hundred leaders of all parties and communities to attend a Unity Conference to be held in Delhi on 23rd September. Even the communal and the Anglo-Indian Press became subdued in tone. When the conference of all party leaders met at Delhi there was a powerful wave of sentiment pulsating in the country seeking Hindu-Muslim Unity. Motilal Nehru presided over the Conference. Among those who attended were Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Mohammad Ali, the Most Reverend the Metropolitan of India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, C. R. Das, Babu Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Malaviya and Maulana Hasrat Mohani. A National Panchayat Board was set up to enquire into all disputes and differences. A long resolution on religious toleration was adopted which suggested a compromise on the vexed question of cow slaughter and music before mosques. It was more or less a declaration of rights

of the two communities, and was adopted unanimously by mutual consent. Gandhiji, however, declined to yield to the appeal to give up his fast. "The fast is a matter between God and myself", he said, "I would, therefore, not only ask you to forgive me for not breaking it but would ask you even to encourage and pray for me that it may end successfully". On the appointed day, the 8th October, he ended the fast, and there was great rejoicing and demonstration of friendship between the two communities in Delhi and in other important places in the country.

The efforts to bring about inter-communal amity continued at another All-Parties Conference held in Bombay on 21st November 1924. Apart from the communal question, this Conference had also before it the subject of the notorious Bengal Ordinance. A committee representing all parties was appointed to prepare a scheme of Swaraj including a Communal Settlement and submit a report by 31st March 1925. This committee met in Delhi in January 1925. M. A. Jinnah presented the Muslim point of view and said that the greatest obstacle to the country's progress was the question of representation in the various legislatures and other elective bodies and share in the services. If an agreement was arrived at on these two issues the rest of the problem would be easy of solution. Although they set to work on these questions earnestly and appointed a sub-committee to draw up a draft agreement, it became soon obvious that there was very little common ground between the two extreme views. On 1st March 1925 the sub-committee decided to adjourn *sine die* without coming to any conclusion. The fact was that the steady intensification of communal bitterness that began from about 1923 onwards had led to the growth of a fanatical spirit in both communities. The Arya Samaj began to concentrate on increasing its strength in places where the Hindu community was in a minority. Their propagation of *Shuddhi* and *Sanghatan* was a reaction to the prevailing sense of insecurity in provinces like the Punjab where the Hindus were about 44 per cent of the population. The Mahasabha also began to take more interest in the political situation, and attracted to its fold some of the leaders from the Congress, like Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Malaviya who found themselves in disagreement with some tenets of the Congress. The Gaya session of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Lahore session of the Muslim League indicated the growing differences that were to be accentuated in the succeeding months, although M. A. Jinnah, who presided over the Lahore Session of the League, emphasised the need for Hindu-Muslim unity before Swaraj was thought of. He said, "The one essential and requisite condition to achieve Swaraj is the

political unity between the Hindus and the Muhammadans, for the advent of foreign rule and its continuance in India is primarily due to the fact that the people of India, particularly the Hindus and Mohammadans, are not united and do not sufficiently trust each other”.

Thus, failure was writ large on all efforts to reconcile the differences between the two communities. The situation worsened to some extent as a result of the death of Deshbandhu C. R. Das in June 1925, because he had been able to hold together to some extent the Muslims and Hindus in Bengal. It is significant that in July, a few weeks after the Deshbandhu's death, communal troubles broke out in Calcutta. Lajpat Rai declared that it was the British domination that was responsible for the communal difference in India. Although the year 1925 passed without serious repetition of the troubles of the previous year, it was evident that the views of the extreme sections of the two communities were stiffening. The Muslim League Session was held at Aligarh on 30th December 1925 with Sir Abdur Rahim as President. In his address he criticised a section of Hindu politicians whose mischievous activities, he said, were a challenge to Islam. His suggestion to Muslims was to form a solid Muslim party in the legislatures without which, he feared, the political ruin of their community would follow.

The comparative calm of 1925 proved to be only the lull before the storm. A terrible orgy of violence broke out in the next year. The term of the legislatures elected in 1923 was coming to an end. The next general elections were to take place in November 1926. The moment was, therefore, opportune for communalists and those interested in encouraging them to exploit the differences and exacerbate communal relations. It was a question of winning the votes of the respective communities, and among the ignorant massed an excess of communal zeal is a good vote-catcher. The Britishers and the Anglo-Indian Press also found the united front in the previous legislatures an inconvenience. Their interest in breaking it gave them a relish in fanning the embers of discord. The bureaucracy in its own subtle way fostered suspicion and jealousy by all the favours that officialdom could bestow. As a result of all these forces the major part of 1926 was besmirched with a series of fierce communal clashes. They began in Calcutta where for over six weeks brutal outrages and incendiaryism reigned uncontrolled. From 2nd April to 12th April the first wave of rioting continued unabated. Within these ten days, 327 Hindus and 238 Muslims had been admitted in hospitals, and forty deaths were reported.

After a few days of uneasy quiet, the second wave of orgies began on 23rd April and continued till 9th May and during this period, 61 persons were killed and 385 persons admitted into hospitals. A peculiar feature of this second phase was that roving bands of ruffians attacked individuals in deserted bye-lanes and streets. It appeared as if professional goondas had now taken a hand in the game.

But the root of the disease was undoubtedly political. It was born out of the policy which Lord Minto began, a policy of deliberate encouragement to Muslim interests as against national interests. Minto had told the Muslim deputation, "You justly claim your position should be estimated not merely on your numerical strength but in the respect of the political importance of your community and the services it has rendered to the Empire. I am entirely with you." In an outspoken article that Lord Olivier, a former Secretary of State for India, wrote to *The Times* of London, he admitted that the officers of the Government of India were inclined to favour Muslims. After pointing out the effect of the communal electorates in accentuating and extending the evil influence of the communal principle, he goes on to say :

"Until the communal principle for electoral franchises is eliminated, ordered progress in constitutional Government will be impossible. But there are other causes of the increasing faction-fighting. No one with any close acquaintance of Indian affairs will be prepared to deny that on the whole there is a predominant bias in British officialism in India in favour of the Muslim community, partly on the ground of closer sympathy but more largely as a make-weight against Hindu nationalism. Independently of this and its evil effects, there has been vacillation in Police action and Police court practice, sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, encouraging each side to take liberties. This is almost universally attested by responsible Indians, who impute it—I do not say justly—to a deliberate desire on the part of authority to maintain communal trouble as a testimony against the possibility of constitutional progress".

On the issue of music before the mosques, he goes on to say :

"Hindu processions with music, where there is a Muslim population, may reasonably be prohibited in certain places and at certain times, but the Muslims have no right to expect that these religious rites shall be forbidden at all times and in all streets simply because they have a mosque in every street and

pray at all times of the day. Correspondingly, it is outrageous that Moslems to whom the killing of a cow is at best a mere purveying of butcher's meat, should be allowed, as they have been in some places, to make a public festival and demonstration by leading the poor beast through the streets wreathed with garlands".

This long passage has been quoted because the article was written by a former Secretary of State for India who surely must have known the working of the official mind. It was not a rash and dialectic writing forced on him by controversy, because he further expatiated on it when he moved a resolution in the House of Lords. He said:

"What I meant was that the British official classes, both civil and military, in India have a higher appreciation of the virtues of the Mohammadan section of the population than they generally feel about the Hindus. . . . I do think it is a fair statement to make that predominantly Englishmen who serve in India have a higher appreciation of the Muslim community and think them more capable of dominion than they think the Hindus".

He illustrates his point further by giving an example:

"The feeling which I had encountered and which I had underlined in my mind was something of which I will give you an example. When the Hindu-Muslim Pact was made it was a pact which strengthened the probability of an advance towards Swaraj in India. A very large number of persons, officials and others in India, regard the advance towards the self-governing Swaraj policy as a movement deleterious to British interests in India, and I say confidently that when the Hindu-Muslim pact broke up there was considerable amount of satisfaction felt, and was expressed in what I may call the anti-Swaraj Press in India, that the pact had broken up".

These revealing extracts from the writings and speeches of one who could not be considered to be partial to Indians establish beyond doubt that the communal bitterness and clashes were the consequences of a deliberate policy. There was nothing inherently religious in them, nor were they known in this country in the earlier days. In the seven hundred thousand villages of our country Hindus and Muslims had lived together in peace for centuries. Even after the poison of communalism had pervaded the public life, the two communities had been able to live in amity when brought together by a common purpose. Dr. Ansari said in 1927

that in the days of the Non-Co-operation Movement in Delhi, "We succeed in our endeavours to reduce cow sacrifice from 700 to a mere three or four". But officialdom was interested in backing up even the most unreasonable demands of Muslims. The Bengal Government passed an order on 6th June 1926 that they had "given special consideration to the case of the Nakhoda Mosque in Chitpore Road in Calcutta and have decided that, in consequence of its size, importance and situation, an exception to the general rule will be made in the case of this mosque, and all processions passing it at any time of the day will, when doing so, be required to stop their music". The story was quite different when the citizens of Allahabad wanted to take the usual Ramlila procession along the customary route. Pandit Malaviya's repeated telegrams pointing out that their request for permission was in accordance with long established custom brought forth only the familiar bureaucratic reply that "they are unable to alter the decision already conveyed to you" that permission could be granted only on certain humiliating conditions. The result was that on 16th October the usual Ramlila procession had to be abandoned by the Hindus.

An indication of the degree of estrangement that had grown between the two communities can be gauged from the fact that even that once moderate body, the Khilafat Conference, meeting in May 1926 gave expression to anti-Hindu sentiment which might have pleased even the most rabid member of the community. One of the speakers asked Muslims to have nothing to do with *Kafirs*, and demanded that a corps of ten thousand Muslim volunteers should be raised under Maulana Mohamed Ali's leadership to safeguard the Muslim interests in Delhi. Another speaker happened to refer to Hindus as "brethren", when there was an uproarious demonstration and hundreds of delegates rose up demanding the withdrawal of the word. The Hindu Mahasabha which met at the same time also poured forth its anger against the Muslim extremists whose speeches were responsible for the clashes at Calcutta.

Thus, the tension steadily mounted. All efforts to bring an element of reasonableness and understanding failed. Then suddenly the whole country was shocked by the dreadful news, on 23rd December, that Swami Shraddhanand had been murdered in cold blood while lying on his sick bed by one Abdul Rashid. There was a time during the days of Non-co-operation when Swami Shraddhanand had been enthusiastically welcomed to the Jumma Masjid at Delhi to speak to a Muslim congregation. The Swamiji had during his life-time been a zealous and self-less worker in the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. His martyrdom served one good



purpose. In the presence of the tragedy fanatic communalism stood shamefaced. The hymn of hate was subdued for a while. The Muslims as well as the Hindus expressed sorrow at the tragedy. They both were now willing to face all disputes in a more chastened mood.

Partly as a result of this changed outlook, the first few months of 1927 saw an attempt by both the communities to arrive at a basis of understanding on the political level. If political agreement was reached, then the comparatively minor issues of cow killing and music before mosques would resolve themselves. The recent voting in the Central Assembly on the highly controversial Currency Bill had shown how matters of grave national importance might be jeopardised as a result of communal disunity. The 18 d. ratio had been passed by the Assembly by a narrow majority because many Muslim members had walked into the Government lobby. Then there was the question of an early enquiry into Constitutional reforms. It was necessary to arrive at an agreement on the Communal question before the next step in political progress could be taken. All these considerations prompted the leaders and members of the legislatures of both communities to turn to constructive thinking. S. Srinivasa Iyengar who was the Congress President, issued an appeal, soon after the Budget Session of the Central Assembly had concluded, calling upon the leaders of the two communities to come to an agreement in the achievement of a common political purpose.

On 20th March 1927, some thirty prominent Muslim leaders met at Delhi under the Chairmanship of M. A. Jinnah, and for the first time agreed to give up separate electorates and consent to joint electorates with reservation of seats. But this was subject to certain important conditions, that Sind should be separated from Bombay, and that the Montford Reforms should be introduced in Baluchistan and the North-West Provinces. The purpose was presumably to secure for the Muslims three more Provinces where they would be in an overwhelming majority. Jinnah followed this up with a public statement emphasising that both parts of the Delhi decision—joint electorates and the formation of the three provinces—were inter-dependent, and should be accepted or rejected in their entirety. This was discussed, back and forth, by all the other political groups and by the Indian National Congress. In May 1927, the All-India Congress Committee gave its decision which while welcoming the Delhi resolution on joint electorates, agreed to the question of a Sind province as a part of a general re-constitution of provinces on linguistic basis. Meanwhile, other

Muslim bodies, particularly in Bengal had rejected the Delhi decision. Other events contributed to create further estrangement. The judgment of the Lahore High Court, on what was known as the *Rangila Rasul Case*, acquitting Rajpal, the author of the publication, caused wide-spread Muslim protests. Early in May, riots took place in Lahore and continued for two days.

Later in the year, on 4th September, a serious communal clash occurred in Nagpur. It started, as usual, on a minor question of a religious procession, but developed into one of the worst riots that had taken place in this province. Nineteen persons were killed and 123 injured were admitted into hospitals. But soon after there occurred one of those dramatic incidents whose effects turn out to be quite contrary to what was intended. On 8th November 1927, the Viceroy made a statement announcing the appointment of a Statutory Commission on Reforms consisting wholly of Englishmen. The furious nation-wide protest against this announcement, which was taken to be a gross insult to Indians, submerged for a moment all differences in the country, and gave promise of a renewed, united effort by all parties to vindicate national honour.

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## CHAPTER V

### PRELUDE TO STRUGGLE

After the General Elections of 1926 the Congress found itself, both in the Central Assembly and in the Provincial Councils, less strong than the Swaraj Party had been after the 1923 Elections. It was, therefore, necessary for the Congress members to get into working arrangements with other nationalist groups in order to make any impression on Government. This they were able to do in the Central Assembly where, two days after the January Session began, Motilal Nehru was able to carry an adjournment motion on the question of the detention of S. C. Mitra, a detenu under the Bengal Ordinance, who had been elected to the Assembly. But in the Provincial Councils such a coalition with nationalists was not found feasible. In the Central Provinces Legislative Council the party position was as follows :

Congress : 15; Responsivists : 11; Independent Congress Party : 7; Non-Brahmin Party : 3; Independents : 9; and 1 Liberal. There were seven Muslim members.

When the House met on 11th January 1927 it was clear that the Congress would not be able to make its opposition felt. Nevertheless Ghanshyam Singh Gupta opposed the demand for Ministers' salaries. However, the proposal was carried by a large majority. Raghavendra Rao succeeded in bringing together the Responsivists, Non-Brahmins and Independents on the side of his own Independent Congress Party, and thus formed a conglomerate group of 33 members which he called the Nationalist Party. On 12th January the Finance Member, J. T. Marten, announced the appointment of Dr. Raghavendra Rao and Shri R. M. Deshmukh as Ministers. Shri B. G. Khaparde was elected Deputy President of the Council. The new Ministers took office on 1st February. In spite of the opposition persistently kept up by Dr. Khare, Shri G. S. Gupta, D. K. Mehta and other Congress members, the Budget demands were passed without difficulty. It was, however, becoming obvious that the ties which held the Nationalist Party together were feeble. On several questions of policy the Council successfully censured Government. On the question of appointing Honorary Magistrates Shri Gole's motion was carried inspite of strong official opposition. One could have easily predicted that the nationalist coalition was not destined to survive long.

Meanwhile, outside the legislature, the Congress in Nagpur decided to awaken public sense of resistance by organising a satyagraha campaign to defy the Arms Act. It was intended to be a protest against the continued incarceration of the Bengal Ordinance detenus including Subhas Chandra Bose. This satyagraha did not have the whole-hearted backing even of the Nagpur Congress Committee: in fact the decision to launch it was taken by the casting vote of the President. It failed also to capture wider attention in the country, although in one other place, in Madura, a similar demonstration was organised. Batches of volunteers carrying drawn swords, in violation of the Arms Act, marched along the roads in Nagpur until they were arrested. The campaign remained all along non-violent, and its leader M. R. Awari was sentenced on 4th June to four years' rigorous imprisonment. But soon after, on 1st July, the satyagraha was suspended because of Gandhiji's view that an armed satyagraha cannot break the Arms Act.

The fact was that the country was not yet ready for a satyagraha on a mass scale. The increasing tension in the relations between Hindus and Muslims, the violent agitation by Muslims against the acquittal of the author of *Rangila Rasul*, the continuance of Gandhiji in his retirement from politics and the differences of opinion among the nationalists—all combined to make the situation unpropitious for any mass movement. What was needed was some overwhelming event which would lift people out of their petty preoccupations, bring them face to face with vital national issues, and weld them together to achieve a common purpose. Such an event, as has already been mentioned, occurred in the appointment of an "all-White" Reforms Commission.

On October 26th Gandhiji was touring the western coast of Malabar on his mission of spreading the gospel of Khadi and collecting funds. There he received a message to say that the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, would like to meet him at Delhi on the 5th November. Gandhiji never stood on prestige, and was always willing to meet and talk things over with the authority. He promptly broke off his tour and went direct to Delhi. On reaching there he found that Vithalbhai Patel, Srinivasa Iyengar and Dr. Ansari had also been invited by the Viceroy. They all walked into the Viceroy's room together. Then, after the cold formalities of reception, Lord Irwin handed over to them a Memorandum announcing the appointment of a Royal Commission to enquire into the Constitutional Reforms for India. It was to be headed by Sir John Simon, and the other six members were: Viscount Burnham, Lord Strathcona, E. C. Cadogan, Stephen Walsh, Col.

George Lane-Fox and Major C. R. Atlee. Gandhiji read the memorandum and waited for Irwin to say something; but he kept silent. Then, Gandhiji asked him if this was all the purpose for which he had been summoned from over 1,200 miles away; to which the Viceroy said, "yes". Gandhiji got up and took the earliest train back to the west coast to continue his interrupted tour. The biographer of Lord Irwin, describing this incident, calls it "a deplorable lack of tact in the handling of the Indian leaders". For, after the monosyllabic interview with Gandhiji, Irwin had called other Indian leaders also and had enacted a similar scene.

Having, in this manner, prepared the ground, the Viceroy made a formal announcement on the 8th November giving the background of the appointment of the Commission and the nature and purpose of the enquiry. The 1919 Act had provided for a decennial review of the political situation in India. But the impatient Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, had decided to appoint the Commission for this review two years earlier. For, who knows, he and his party may not be in power by 1929—as, indeed, they were not—and he would not be able to carry out his intentions about India. Was he not the person who had asked in the British Parliament, "what man in this House can say that he can see in a generation, in two generations, in a hundred years, any prospect that the people of India will be in a position to assume control of the Army, the Navy, the Civil Service, and to have a Governor-General who will be responsible to the Indian Government and not to any authority in this country?" The Gods must indeed have smiled amusedly at that moment, for all these were to happen in less than a generation, in less than twenty years.

Rarely had the British Government shown a greater lack of imagination, a more astounding ignorance of the Indian temper than in appointing this Commission from which Indians were completely excluded. The announcement produced an effect such as the Britishers never expected. It raised a storm of protest from every part of the country, and from every party. Never had such a sweeping unanimity been achieved in the political sphere in the country. Among the first to protest most emphatically were the Liberals under the leadership of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. When British Government was engaged in setting up this Commission earlier in the year, Sapru happened to be in England and he had forebodings of what was being hatched. Therefore, soon after the announcement, the Liberal paper *The Leader* observed: "This long-looked-for Statutory Commission as it is constituted, is both

an injury and an insult to India. It is a calculated affront to Indian opinion, to Indian intelligence as well as to Indian self-respect. We declare our want of confidence in the Commission. It is our considered opinion that our countrymen should have nothing to do with it". This Liberal view has been quoted because it was from this quarter, if from any, that the British had confidently expected willing co-operation.

Another section which they thought might also be wooed and won over was the Muslim community. But even here they had grossly miscalculated. On 16th November, M. A. Jinnah took the initiative to circulate a Manifesto of protest to leaders of all political parties in India, and published it with their signatures. The Manifesto said, among other things, that the "the underlying principle of the scheme, that Indians are to have no authoritative voice either in the collection of proper material and evidence or in the taking of decisions by way of recommendations of the Commission to Parliament is of such a character that India cannot, with any self-respect, acquiesce in it. Unless a Commission on which the British and Indian statesmen are invited to sit on equal terms is set up we cannot conscientiously take any part or share in the work of the Commission". The Hindu Mahasabha, at a special session, expressed its strong and emphatic protest against the composition of the Simon Commission which, they said, was a violation of the fundamental rights of self-determination. They, therefore, called for a country-wide boycott.

As was to be expected, the Congress served as the spearhead of the opposition. In a long statement the Congress President, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, fervently appealed to the people to join in a comprehensive boycott of the Commission—both political and social—refusing to join even receptions and parties given in the Commission's honour. Further, as a positive step, we should proceed to frame our Swaraj constitution. "We are going to be choosers of our own fate, not beggars". Birkenhead perhaps had this in mind when he said in the House of Lords on 24th November, "It is sometimes said by our critics in India that it is for India to decide upon the form of the Constitution suitable for themselves, and then for British Parliament formally to pass it. I can only make this comment. I have twice in the three years, during which I have been Secretary of State, invited our critics in India, not only to put forward their own suggestions for a Constitution but to indicate to us the form which, in their judgment, the Constitution should take. The offer is still open". The Secretary of State probably thought that the Indians would never be able to agree among

themselves. But India decided to take him at his word. The Madras Session of the Congress with Dr. Ansari as President, adopted a resolution authorising the Working Committee to convene an All-Parties Conference in order to draw up an agreed Constitution for India.

It is necessary here to observe that a little before the Simon Commission was appointed there came out a publication by an American tourist, Katherine Mayo, under the title "Mother India" which was a scurrilous and indiscriminate attack on India. Its publication was carefully timed. There was a general belief that this vilification of Indian character and culture was deliberately brought out to precede the Simon enquiry. The woman who wrote it had travelled in India with all the advantages of official patronage. Soon after the publication of her book, which Gandhiji picturesquely described as a "drain Inspector's report", there appeared an article in *The Statesman* of Calcutta by one Pilcher which served as a companion piece to it, both in its vulgarity and in its falsehood. The storm of protests against these foul mudslingings merged with the larger agitation against the Simon Commission.

Before narrating the fate of the Simon Commission it is relevant to trace the efforts made for bringing about communal unity. A Unity Conference was held at Simla in August at the end of which an appeal was issued by the Congress and Muslim leaders beseeching both the communities to refrain from doing anything to disturb public tranquillity. This failed to have much effect; and, as we saw earlier, there were violent outbreaks in Nagpur in September which required the military to be called in. This was followed by another attempt to bring about peace, and a Unity Conference met at Calcutta in the last week of October. Dr. Ansari, Maulana Mohamad Ali and S. Srinivasa Iyengar exerted themselves in ironing out differences. They ultimately succeeded in passing a resolution which while admitting the freedom to play music before mosques and for sacrificing cows, called upon the respective communities to accept voluntary restrictions of the freedom in order not to hurt the susceptibilities of the other.

But all these resolutions could produce no tangible results as they were not adopted by the extreme groups of the two communities who, in fact, controlled the fanatical elements. As it happened, the Muslim League at this time was divided into two wings, and they quarreled over the venue of the Session to be held in December, 1927. As no agreement was possible, there took place two separate conferences, one at Calcutta presided over by Maalvi Mohammad Yakub and attended by M. A. Jinnah, and the other



at Lahore with Sir Mohammad Shafi as President. This division was unfortunate because it divided the Muslim opinion on the boycott of Simon Commission. The Calcutta Session adopted the Resolution on the boycott, on terms identical with that adopted by the Congress. Among those who spoke in its favour was Mohammad Ali who said, in the course of his speech, that Katherine Mayo's book had been written on information supplied to her by the members of the Imperial Services. By another Resolution the League at Calcutta agreed to confer with the Congress in drawing up a Constitution for India in which Muslim interests would be safeguarded according to the principles stated in the Delhi proposals. The parallel Session held at Lahore was imbued with quite a contrary spirit. It represented a gathering of the loyalists—the feudal and capitalist class of Muslims—Nawabs and Knights of the British Empire—upon whom the hopes of the Simon Commission were centred. They naturally expressed their loyalty in no uncertain terms and offered their support and co-operation to the Simon Commission. Amidst the chorus of nation-wide denunciation of the Simon Circus, the lone voice of the Lahore Muslim Landlords rose up in gratitude and praise. In this connection a letter written by Lord Birkenhead to the Viceroy at this time is very revealing. He wrote:

“I should advise Simon to see at all stages all people who are not boycotting the Commission, particularly Muslims and depressed classes. I should widely advertise all his interviews with representative Muslims. The whole policy is now obvious. It is to terrify the immense Hindu population by the apprehension that the Commission is being got hold of by Muslims, and may present a Report altogether destructive of of the Hindu position, thereby securing solid Muslim support and leaving Jinnah high and dry.”

At about the same time, more than 1,500 miles south of Lahore, the Indian National Congress was meeting at Madras with Dr. Ansari as President. Apart from the unqualified rejection of the Simon Commission, and the decision to draft a Swaraj Constitution, reference to which has already been made, the Madras Session was noteworthy for yet another reason. Here for the first time a younger generation of leadership in the nation's freedom struggle began to make itself felt. This group found its natural leader in Jawaharlal Nehru who had recently returned from Europe. On the second day of the Congress Session he moved the historic resolution that “This Congress declares the goal of the Indian people to be complete National Independence”.

This was a fitting reply to Birkenhead and the British Government. It was a dignified and clear statement of India's goal. The Resolution was passed unanimously.

This was the mood of India when Simon and his men landed in Bombay on 3rd February, 1928. India observed it as a day of mourning. There was a complete hartal everywhere. Bombay looked a deserted city. Black flags and shouts of "Go back, Simon" greeted them wherever they went. It was a unique and impressive spectacle of a whole nation united and determined in a non-violent act of protest. Sir John Simon tried to put on the best face possible in the circumstances. Reaching Delhi the day after his landing in Bombay, he told a press representative that he had received three hundred telegrams of welcome. He further tried to placate Indian opinion by explaining the scheme of "Joint Conference" with Indian Committees. But the nation was not willing to be fooled. There was a brilliant debate in the Central Assembly for two days on 16th and 17th February, on a motion by Lala Lajpat Rai saying that "the present Constitution and scheme of the Statutory Commission are wholly unacceptable to this House and that this House will, therefore, have nothing to do with the Commission at any stage and in any form". It was a severe indictment of the way Britain had ignored the demands of India and had heaped this gratuitous insult upon her. In a voice filled with emotion Lajpat Rai said:

"This struggle will not end with this Commission. It is going to continue. I know that our work is very arduous, but I can assure you that whatever may happen we shall bear our sufferings cheerfully. We shall not appeal to the Britishers for mercy. At the same time, we shall do everything that lies in our power to impress on the British Nation that we are in earnest, in dead earnest to be masters in our own house."

Other speakers pointed out why Britain had chosen this moment to send the Commission. The British Government wanted to take advantage of the disturbance and communal tension that prevailed in the country at the time. They thought there were sharp differences between the various parties in India; they supposed that the communal riots which disfigured the public life of the country would continue, and they said to themselves "strike the iron while it is hot: let us send out the Commission at this moment, when India is apparently torn by feuds". Jinnah and Pandit Malaviya stoutly supported the protest. The Leader of the Congress Party, Motilal Nehru, who had recently been in England

and knew the story behind the Commission, denounced the whole scheme. He spoke of India's determination to stand on her own legs. "Governments which have not paid attention to the lessons of History have invariably come to grief, to an ignominious end," he said, "and I have no doubt that what has not been accomplished by the statesmanship of England will be accomplished by Destiny which shall help the people of India to add one more to the long list of fallen Empires". The Assembly adopted Lajpat Rai's Resolution by 68 votes against 62.

While the debate was proceeding in the Assembly, Lord Birkenhead, with his innate genius for provoking India, made a speech at Doncaster in which he said:

"Those who delude themselves with the belief that by boycotting the Commission they can defeat its purpose, are living in a world which has no contact with reality. They will realise, month by month, how little representative they are of the vast and heterogenous community of which we are the responsible trustees."

He then defiantly concluded that the work of the Commission will go on whatever the "small fringe of organised political opinion in India" may say or do. Such words, indeed, only helped to confirm India's conviction of Britain's *mala fides* in setting up the Commission.

The legislatures in all the provinces recorded their decision to have nothing to do with the Statutory Commission. The Central Provinces Legislative Council debated on 20th January 1928, a motion by Brijlal Biyani expressing no confidence in the Commission and proposing to boycott it, since it was an insult to the self-respect of the Indian people. Among those who supported Shri Biyani's motion were the Responsivists, T. J. Kedar and B. G. Khaparde, Congressmen Dr. Khare and G. S. Gupta; Mahant Laxminarayan Das and Umesh Dutt Pathak. B. G. Khaparde while supporting the resolution on behalf of the Nationalist Party, added that "the Ministers are members of this party and therefore are with it". After a lively debate in which the Chief Secretary H. C. Gowan stated the Government view, the resolution was carried by a majority. The Government bench did not ask for a division.

This had a curious sequel which occurred later in the year, but may appropriately be mentioned here. In November, the Education Committee which formed part of the Statutory Commission, known generally as Hartog Committee, had asked the

Director of Public Instruction of Central Provinces to depute witness to appear before the Committee. The Director, E. A. Macnee, on his own responsibility, instructed a number of subordinate officers to be prepared for appearing before the Committee. The Education Minister, Dr. Raghavendra Rao, came to know of this at this stage. He firmly objected to this action, because as Minister for the transferred subject of Education, he was bound by the verdict of the Legislative Council not to have anything to do with the activities of the Statutory Commission. The Governor, Sir Montagu Butler accepted the constitutional objection taken by his Minister, and the officers, some of whom had already packed up their kit-bag, were ordered not to appear before the Committee. Hartog and his men had to swallow the contretemps and do without the counsel of Mr. Macnee and his officers.

Meanwhile the positive side of India's answer to the British Government, namely, to produce an agreed Constitution, was engaging the attention of the All-Parties Conference which met first at Delhi and later at Bombay. The task they had undertaken bristled with difficulties. There was at the outset the difference in the objective, whether it should be complete Independence, as decided by the Madras Congress or Dominion Status. Then there was the intricate tangle of the communal settlement. The opinions expressed were so varied and so difficult of reconciliation, that the Bombay meeting appointed a smaller committee with Motilal Nehru as Chairman, and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Ali Imam, M. R. Jayakar, Subhas Chandra Bose, M. S. Aney, G. R. Pradhan (both from Madhya Pradesh), Shuaib Qureshi and others as members. After days of ceaseless and anxious labour the Committee was able to submit its Report—familiarily known as Nehru Report—defining the principles of the Constitution of India. It represented the maximum area of agreement between the different parties. It accepted Dominion Status as the basis of the Constitution of India. It proposed to solve the communal problem by safeguards and special protection to the minority communities, and the setting up of Communal Councils to protect their separate cultural interests. Separate electorates were to be abolished.

Nehru Report was presented in July 1928, but two months earlier, on 5th May 1928, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, one of the important leaders of the All-Parties Conference had left for England. About a month before Jinnah's departure, the Simon Commission too had sailed for England on 31st March 1928 after completing their preliminary visit to India. Jinnah was away from India for

a little over five months. The Simon Commission returned to India on 11th October, and M. A. Jinnah on 26th October. He returned a different man. He gave up his support of joint electorates, supported the demand of Mohammad Shafi group for separate electorates, and totally disapproved of the recommendations of Nehru Report. From now on Jinnah the nationalist was rapidly transformed into Jinnah, the communalist. How it ultimately culminated in his so called Fourteen Points and the final break with all nationalism, we shall see later.

Meanwhile an overture to the coming struggle was preparing under Gandhiji's watchful eyes. Six years ago he had suddenly called off Satyagraha because of the violence at Chauri Chaura. He had called it off at a time when he was about to launch a campaign at Bardoli. He had waited for six years for people to imbibe the principle of Satyagraha which lies in non-violence. Several times during this period persons had begged him to initiate a campaign; but he had firmly refused, saying that the moment had not yet arrived. Now, on 12th February 1928, he decided that the time had come, and he launched it at the same place where six years ago he had intended to start it, at Bardoli. In this quiet village in Gujrat, the villagers were faced with a sudden and unjustified increase in land tax by 22 per cent. It was impossible for them to pay it; and they firmly and peacefully refused to pay it. To lead and direct this campaign Gandhiji chose Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who was at that time Mayor of Ahmedabad. The manner in which the peasants stood up to the tyranny and persecution of the officers, and bravely and non-violently allowed all their possessions, cattle, house-hold goods, pots and pans, carts and horses, even their ploughs to be confiscated, and suffered hunger and privations with fortitude, thrilled the whole country. Vallabhbhai Patel who directed the campaign with consummate generalship became the "Sardar". The Government of Bombay was, as usual, adamant and unthinking. To them the issue was "whether the writ of His Majesty the King-Emperor is to run in a portion of His Majesty's dominions." The struggle grew bitter. Gandhiji himself moved to Bardoli at the beginning of August. And then, abruptly, on 6th August Government yielded. They agreed to release all prisoners and return all confiscated land and property. In return Sardar Patel promised that the peasants would pay their taxes at the old rates. Satyagraha had triumphed.

The weapon had proved its mettle. A grave provocation was soon to follow. The second "visitation" of the Simon Commission from October onwards was the signal for a ruthless putting down

of all demonstrations against the Commission. The itinerary began from Poona. A Central Committee had already been appointed by the Viceroy in defiance of the Assembly's clear verdict. The arrival of the Commission at Poona was greeted with hartal and black-flag demonstration, but no untoward incident took place. A mammoth meeting was held in the evening on the day of their arrival to voice the opposition of the people. After a fortnight's stay in Poona, the Commission went to Lahore. These two places had been chosen as the first testing grounds of the Commission perhaps for political reasons. Dr. Ambedkar was on the Bombay Provincial Committee; and in Lahore was Sir Mian Mohammad Shafi who led the Muslim delegation to give evidence before the Commission: the two stalwarts on whom the Government depended to give the Commission a good start.

But the Lahore visit began tragically. On 30th October, the day of the Commission's arrival, a huge procession with black flags and placards saying "Simon, Go Back", started from the Municipal Gardens towards the railway station. It was led by Lala Lajpatrai and included Pandit Malaviya, Dr. Alam, Maulana Zafar Ali, Lala Hansraj, Sardar Mangal Singh and Abdul Qadir Kasuri. After wending its way through the city gathering in volume as it went, the procession was halted about two hundred yards from the main gate to the railway station. Barbed wires and wooden posts barred the way. What happened thereafter is best told in Lajpat Rai's own words :

"We assembled near the railway station and, finding the barbed wire barricades, we made no attempt to cross or rush it. We were absolutely peaceful, and gave no provocation to the police to attack us. But a police officer, said to be the Superintendent of Police in Lahore, whose name was afterwards given as Scott, began to strike us with lathis. He had a knobbed hunter in his hand. He gave me two blows and two of his constables gave me another two. One of these blows was aimed at my heart, and very near my heart I received a stroke which has caused a bruise sufficiently long and broad."

Those who stood by him, Dr. Alan, Dr. Satyapal and Lala Hansraj tried to ward off the blows and received severe injuries. From that day the 'Lion of the Punjab' was a dying man. Persistent fever and a painful swelling on the heart kept him in bed. On 17th November, a little over a fortnight after the attack, he

passed away and filled a mourning nation with furious indignation. A struggle with British Imperialism was now inevitable. With a sacrifice so precious it became sacred duty. In the face of official callousness it would be an act of justice. When Col. Wedgwood asked in the House of Commons if the Punjab Government had expressed regret to Lala Lajpat Rai's family, the under Secretary for India, Earl Winterton, complacently replied that no Government, when it found it necessary to use force, was justified in apologising to any body, and no evidence was forthcoming to show that the death was due to the action of the Police!

The legislatures generally, and the Indian Legislative Assembly in particular, had been the forum for the expression of the Nation's feelings and opinions ever since they were formed in 1927, after the third general elections. The indignation of the people at Lajpat Rai's death found expression in the Central Assembly on 15th February when D. P. Mishra moved his Resolution condemning the police action and expressing resentment at Earl Winterton's reply in the British Parliament. He described the act as a deliberate murder and it could never be suppressed. "Murder will cry from the house-tops for revenge and redress". Speaking on behalf of the younger generation of India he warned the British Government against its callous disregard of India's feelings, and concluded saying, "The murder of Lala Lajpat Rai has gone deep into the heart of the Nation. So long as these front bench leaders (Motilal Nehru, Malaviya and others) are here the Government may be able to hear correct parliamentary language, but the day is soon coming when they will have to hear a language less polite, less parliamentary and more irresistible."

Before describing the steady rise in the tempo of the National movement during 1929, it is necessary to refer to the Session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in December 1928, presided over by Motilal Nehru. This was a mark of tribute to him for the monumental work he had done in preparing the Nehru Report. And it was in deference to the Report and as a step to rally the maximum volume of political support behind its recommendations, that the Calcutta Congress, modifying the Madras Session's decision, accepted the principle of Dominion Status embodied in Nehru Report. Mahatma Gandhi himself moved the adoption of the Report and its objective. There was a tense conflict between the two views: the opposite school of Complete Independence being led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. The police excesses at Lucknow and Cawnpore during the observance of Lajpat Rai Day, the lathi blows received by leaders like

Govind Ballabh Pant and Jawaharlal Nehru on 29th November,—all these had embittered national feeling. It was this that made the younger generation feel, as Subhas Chandra Bose put it, that “all expect the Congress to take up a bold attitude which would be consonant with our self-respect” and not water down the Independence goal accepted the previous year.

But there was, in fact, no conflict between the two views, as Gandhiji explained in his reply to the debate. No form of Dominion Status would survive if it stood in the way of fullest growth. He then said :

“If you will help me and follow the programme honestly and intelligently, I promise that Swaraj will come within one year.”

And so, once again, after more than six years, Mahatma Gandhi became the active leader of the Nation.

The year 1929 was crucial period of preparation. The boycott of foreign cloth was in full swing. The boycott of Simon dogged his steps wherever he went. Almost the last impression that Sir John Simon had in India was something he could not have forgotten easily. He was seated in the distinguished visitors' gallery in the Legislative Assembly on 8th April, when suddenly two country-made bombs were thrown into the Chamber by Bhagat Singh who had managed to make his way to the Assembly Hall. Luckily the bomb did not injure any one. Some red pamphlets with the heading “Hindustan Socialist Republican Army” were also scattered in the house along with the bombs. Bhagat Singh, and his companion were arrested. With that somewhat vivid impression of India's reaction, Sir John left India soon after, on 13th April.

A bye-product of this incident was a conflict between the President of the Assembly and the Government which developed into a major constitutional issue. When the assembly met next on 20th January 1930, it was found that Government had posted uniformed policemen in the Visitors' Galleries. As soon as the President entered he had a quick look round, and saw them seated in the gallery. Before any other business was taken up, he rose and made a statement objecting to Government's interference with the authority of the President who was, inside the House, the sole authority responsible for the protection of the members. The posting of policemen was done in defiance of his authority. He therefore, ordered the clearing of the entire Visitors' Gallery immediately and closed them until further orders. The Home



Member and the Government benches were discomfited. The President proceeded with the rest of the business unruffled. Exactly a month later, it was known that the Government had yielded and accepted the President's stand. On 20th February, President Patel read a communication from the Viceroy to the House agreeing to the right of the President to control the watch and ward arrangements in the House, and deputing to the Assembly Secretariat for this purpose a Senior police officer who will be directly responsible to the President and be designated the Watch and Ward Officer of the Assembly. A special staff would be recruited by the Assembly for this purpose. As the Viceroy had thus, conceded the principle affirmed by the President, the matter ended there, and with effect from the next day of the sitting, the public galleries were declared open. President Patel had triumphed again.

The proceedings of the Central Assembly had been in the full gaze of the whole country and even the outside world, all these months. The brilliant manner in which President V. J. Patel fought for and upheld the rights and privileges of Indian Legislative Assembly was a wonder to the nation and a nightmare to the Government. He insisted on the Assembly Secretariat being independent of the Government of India's Law Department and directly under him. He prevented the Government from rushing through the Assembly with indecent haste the notorious Public Safety Bill, firstly by insisting on proper notice being given, and subsequently by asking Government not to proceed with it while the Meerut trial was pending since the debate on the Bill was bound to raise matters which were *sub judice*. The Viceroy had, therefore, to issue an Ordinance containing all the provisions of the Public Safety Bill. Some Anglo-Indian newspapers and the correspondent of a British daily cast aspersions on the President's rulings. The House protested vigorously. Even the Home Member, J. Crerar, who at first was inclined to be cavalier, had to bow to the President's will. The Assembly passes granted to the correspondents were promptly withdrawn by the President. India's first elected President of the Assembly had to perform his duties against heavy odds : a powerfully entrenched bureaucracy, a reactionary Constitution, an utter lack of parliamentary precedents. But by his firm and impartial rulings, courageous defence of members' rights, his mastery of procedure, he endowed his high office with such dignity and awe that it extorted the fear and respect of the Treasury Benches throughout his regime. Equally distinguished was the Parliamentary ability of the Leader of the opposition.

Motilal Nehru, whose eloquent championship of national interests would have done honour to any democratic legislature in the world.

As the year 1929 advanced, the forces in the country were steadily assuming a clear pattern in which the liberating and reactionary forces were ranging themselves on opposite sides. The repressive policy of the Government helped this demarcation. From 20th March the Government started a campaign of mass arrests and house-searches in order, ostensibly, to unearth a plot against the King-Emperor. Thirty-one persons from different parts of the country, among whom were two Englishmen, Philip Spratt and B. F. Bradley, were rounded up, hand-cuffed and taken to Meerut where they were kept for four years on trial. It was a part of Britain's anti-Communist hysteria. Ever since England broke off relations with Russia in 1927, Government of India began to suspect the infiltration of Communism into the country. It was a new phase of the Russian bogey. A few Trade Unions with pronounced progressive policy were suspected as Communist cells. The Meerut trials were the first large-scale action that Government decided to take in order to counter the Communist influence.

While this policy led to the stiffening of the struggle against the Government, the doubtful elements behind the struggle began to drop off. We have seen the *volte face* of Jinnah since his return from his sojourn in England. After having fallen foul of the Nehru Report, he came forward with his "Fourteen Points" which summed up all that reactionary communalism could wish for. It would perhaps be wrong to presume a conspiracy between the two; if so, it is a tribute to Jinnah's intelligent anticipation and Sir John Simon's striking intuition, that the Government of India Act of 1935, based on Simon Report, conceded all Jinnah's fourteen points except perhaps one. Muslim reactionaries won their final victory when a friendly meeting between Jinnah and Mohammad Shafi took place and, as a Muslim commentator observed, "a great unity was attained by this reunion at a very critical time in the history of the Mussalmans." (Noman : *Muslim India* p. 305).

An event of some importance to India took place in England before the year was out. The General Elections of May 1929, threw the Conservatives out of power and returned Labour as the largest party in the House of Commons. Thus, Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time, and Wedge-wood Benn became the Secretary of State for India. Lord Irwin went to England to consult the new Government. He stayed there till October, and had talks with other British statesmen as well, especially Simon, Baldwin, Reading and Churchill. On his

return to India he made a statement which, if it had been made two years earlier, might have had some effect. Once again Government action was "too late". He said that after the Simon Commission had submitted its report, the British Government would invite the representatives of different parties and interests in India and of the Indian States, to a Round Table Conference. He also stated that "the natural issue of India's constitutional progress is the attainment of Dominion Status." But even this gesture was shorn of all grace. Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Dr. Ansari and others were willing to accept the offer at its face value, but wanted an assurance that the Round Table Conference would not be expected to determine whether or when Dominion Status should come, but rather proceed to draft a Constitution on the basis of Dominion Status. On 23rd December, the leaders met Irwin at Delhi to get this assurance. But the Viceroy could only say that "he was unable to prejudice or commit the conference in any way." Thus, the die was cast.

A week later the historic Lahore Session of the Congress met. Jawaharlal Nehru, was appropriately the President of the Session. But it was Gandhiji, who declared, "Swaraj is now to mean Complete Independence." The struggle had now begun. The flag of Independence had been unfurled. Once again Gandhiji had assumed the leadership of the struggle.

Those who were present at the momentous Congress Session at Lahore were conscious of a new spirit and impulse in its proceedings. It was symbolised in the Presidential Address at the conclusion of which tumultuous shouts of "Long Live Revolution" "Up with the National Flag", "Down with Union Jack" filled the huge pavilion. Nor was the address itself in the conventional language. It spoke of the cry of the hungry peasantry, the exploited masses and the desperate determination of the people to be free. "We who take this perilous path of national strife do so because there is no other way to an honourable peace. . . I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican and am no believer in kings and princes. . . . I recognise, however, that it may not be possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress and in the present circumstances of the country, to adopt a full socialistic programme. But we must realise that the philosophy of socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over, and almost the only point in dispute is the pace and the methods of advance to its full realisation. India will have to go that way too if she seeks to end her

poverty and inequality." Those were prophetic words. Nearly a quarter of a century later, at Avadi, the Congress adopted the goal of a socialistic pattern of society.

The trumpet-call for the struggle came from Lahore Congress. A few minutes past midnight of the 31st December, when the new year had begun, the President, Jawaharlal Nehru, came out into the biting cold night of a Punjab winter, where thousands of congressmen had gathered defying the severity of the icy winds, and hoisted the national flag. As the fluttering flag rose up, a thrill went through the vast multitude, and a mighty shout of 'Vande Mataram' pierced the silent air. As the huge gathering began to disperse to the camps the eastern horizon was tinged with the rose-tinted light of a new dawn, which brought to the hearts of the thousands gathered there and to the millions all over the country, a new hope and the promise of a brighter day.

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## CHAPTER VI

### CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE—1930

Before starting the struggle it was necessary to bring home to the millions of people all over the country the purpose and significance of the struggle. An impressive and dramatic ceremony in which all people could participate should serve to set the tone of the movement. Therefore, one of the first decisions of the new Working Committee gave the country this directive :

“In order to carry the message of Purna Swaraj—Complete Independence—to the remotest villages in India, this Committee appoints Sunday, the 26th January 1930, as the day of celebration when the declaration to be hereafter issued by the Working Committee will be read to the meeting in the provincial language, and the members present at the meeting will be invited to signify by show of hands their assent to the declaration.”

This message spread throughout the country, even to the farthest corners, with miraculous speed. For instance, in the Central Provinces reports received showed how in far away villages and hilly areas, in the forest regions of Bilaspur and Mandla and Chanda, not to speak of the more accessible parts of the State, groups of men, women and children gathered in an open place in the early hours of the morning, hoisted the tri-colour flag, sang the national song and listened to the Message of Independence. The message was an inspiring Declaration of Rights which the Working Committee sent out to the people. Its English version read thus :

“We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives the people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

"India has been ruined economically. The revenue derived from our people is out of all proportion to our income. Our average income is seven pice per day, and of the heavy taxes we pay, 20 per cent are raised from the land revenue derived from the peasantry, and 3 per cent from the salt tax which falls most heavily on the poor.

"Village industries, such as hand-spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts; and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed.

"Customs and currency have been so manipulated as to heap further burdens on the peasantry. The British manufactured goods constitute the bulk of our imports. Customs duties betray clear partiality for British manufacturers, and revenue from them is used not to lessen the burden on the masses but for sustaining a highly extravagant administration. Still more arbitrary has been the manipulation of the exchange ratio, which has resulted in millions being drained away from the country.

"Politically, India's status has never been so reduced as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people. The tallest of us have to bend before foreign authority. The rights of free expression of opinion and free association have been denied to us, and many of our countrymen are compelled to live in exile abroad and cannot return to their homes. All administrative talent is killed, and the masses have to be satisfied with petty village offices and clerkships.

"Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings and our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us.

"Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly, and the presence of an alien army of occupation, employed with deadly effect to crush in us the spirit of resistance, has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defence against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families from the attacks of thieves, robbers and miscreants.

"We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this four-fold disaster to

our country. We recognise, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British Government, and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj."

From now on events began to move rapidly towards the predestined struggle. In obedience to the resolution of the Lahore Congress members of the Central Assembly and the Provincial Legislatures resigned their seats. If there was any doubt about the illusory nature of the Viceroy's statement of October 1929 regarding the goal of Dominion Status, it was dispelled by his address to the Assembly on 25th January 1930, expatiating on the difference between the goal and the long journey to the goal. "The assertion of a goal", he said "is of necessity a different thing from the goal's attainment". Writing in *Young India* on 30th January, Gandhiji thanked the Viceroy for clearing the atmosphere. He then stated his eleven points, which he had formerly presented to Lord Reading, and said that if the Viceroy could bring himself to accepting them, Congress would be willing to join any conference.

The Working Committee, meanwhile, entrusted Gandhiji with absolute powers for conducting the Civil Disobedience campaign. But the General was still undecided about the most effective plan. By the end of February he made his decision. The remarkable article which he published in *Young India* of 27th February under the heading "When I Am Arrested" is a masterpiece of clear sighted orders such as any General would issue to his army. He wrote :

"This time, on my arrest, there is to be no mute passive non-violence, but non-violence of the most active type should be set in motion so that not a single believer in non-violence as an article of faith for the purpose of achieving India's goal, should find himself free or alive at the end of the effort . . . . So far as I am concerned, my intention is to start the movement only through the inmates of the Ashram and those who have submitted to its discipline."



He made it clear that there was to be no withdrawal of the movement as happened in 1922—

“Whilst, therefore, every effort imaginable and possible should be made to restrain the forces of violence, civil disobedience once begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive.”

Before launching the campaign, as part of the duty of a Satyagrahi, Gandhiji, wrote a long letter to the Viceroy on 2nd March stating the cause and principles of the movement, a letter which is indispensable for a true understanding of Gandhiji, as well as of the nature of Civil Disobedience. He concluded it, saying, “If you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, then on the twelfth day of this month I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the Salt Laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man’s standpoint. (As the Independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil.” The letter was delivered to the Viceroy through a special messenger, Reginal Reynolds. But the reply Gandhiji received was a brief acknowledgment, in the stiff official fashion, from the Secretary, saying, “His Excellency regrets to learn that you contemplate a course which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace”. The bitter struggle was now inevitable and could be commenced with a clear conscience.

Before narrating the course of this epic campaign and its reverberations in Madhya Pradesh it is necessary to recall briefly the main political currents in this State that preceded it. The activity in the Legislature was considerably hampered because of the instability of the political groups. We saw in an earlier chapter how a combination of some of these groups was able to command a majority for a time and formed a ministry. But fissures developed in this coalition and in August 1928, the two ministers, Dr. Raghavendra Rao and R. M. Deshmukh, resigned before the no-confidence motion which had been tabled could be moved. Again a new combination of groups was formed and another Ministry took office which also had to break up within six months. Within a period of a little over three years, between 1927 and 1930, four different ministries held office. Combinations were formed and reformed with kaleidoscopic variety. It was obvious that in a state of such instability there was little scope for substantial

work. The Lekislative Council, however, had the distinction of being the only Council which consistently refused to appoint a Provincial Committee to assist the Statutory Commission.

Outside the legislature political life was centred in the Local Boards and District Councils which were particularly active. Most of these bodies were vigorously nationalistic. Reports of the Deputy Commissioners of several districts lament that the Local Boards insist on flying the national flag on their offices. The numerous school teachers controlled by the local boards and the District Councils were all imbued with national spirit. The case of the Raipur District Council is typical of many others. Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, who presided over the Council for full three years till he was absorbed in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, used the institutions under the Council successfully for the propagation of the national spirit. The Deputy Commissioner, Raipur, reports: "He (Shukla) had spared no pains in inculcating "anti-government" doctrines in the minds of school masters and getting them to spread "disloyalty and disaffection" in the villages. Every year the teachers were brought to the headquarters for conferences and lectured to on political subjects and trained in lathi drill, etc. . . . The successive 'victories' he scored over Government in the appointment of supervisors construction of press buildings, etc., duly impressed on the minds of the staff his powers and considerably enhanced his prestige" (Letter of Deputy Commissioner to the Commissioner, Chhattisgarh Division, dated the 26th August 1930,—File 21/CDM of 1931). Other District Councils like Butul, Amravati, Jabalpur, were also active and independent.

A conspicuous feature of the Freedom Movement during this period was the awakening of the youth and the establishment of Youth Leagues in many parts of this State. Throughout 1929 Youth and Students' organizations took an increasing part in the national movement. In November 1929, the Central Provinces Youth Conference was held at Nagur with Subhas Chandra Bose as President. In the following month the Berar Students Conference was held at Amravati which was also presided over by Subhas Bose. There were semi-cultural institutions like the Hanuman Vyayam Mandal in Berar which played an important part in training and developing the youth for national service. When the Simon Commission visited Nagpur in March 1929, the Youth League and the Students' organizations were in the forefront of the protest demonstration against the Commission. The movement had a special appeal to students of schools and colleges. Soon after

the summer vacation of 1930 the educational institutions became strong centres of youth agitation. In Nagpur on 14th July a procession of students entered Hislop College and hoisted the national flag on the building. This naturally provoked the Provincial Government, particularly because the college was a Christian Missionary institution. A warning was issued by the Education Department that if picketing and boycott were continued by students Government would be compelled to close the educational institutions. This warning did not serve to subdue the students' spirits. Therefore, by the 4th August, all colleges in Nagpur including the Medical and Engineering schools and the Government colleges at Amravati and Jabalpur were closed, and it was not till nearly the end of the year that some of them were reopened.

Another stream of considerable strength that went to swell the freedom movement was the Labour organization. In November 1929, the All-India Trade Union Congress met at Nagpur with Jawaharlal Nehru, as President. But it was at this conference that the Labour movement was unfortunately split into two wings, the Right Wing under N. M. Joshi and Chamanlal, seceding from the main body which was controlled by the G. I. P. Railway Union and the Girni Kamgar Union. These latter had distinct affinities with the League against Imperialism and other leftist International movements. The division was further hastened because of the appointment of the Whitley Commission on Labour on which, unlike the Simon Commission, two Indian leaders, N. M. Joshi and Chamanlal, were appointed. Despite these differences of policy, organised labour was a powerful force in the freedom struggle in this State, as in most parts of the country.

Thus, when the signal for the struggle came from Sabarmati, Madhya Pradesh, like the rest of the country, was eager and ready. The supreme strategist in Gandhiji knew instinctively how to launch the movement with the greatest effect. Accompanied by seventy-eight members of his Ashram Gandhiji started the historic march from Sabarmati to Dandi. Subhas Bose compared this to Napoleon's march to Paris or Mussolini's march to Rome. It seems to us rather to suggest Prince Siddhartha's march to Banaras: dedicated, purificatory, seeking to recover the lost Soul of the Nation. For twenty-four days they walked, passing through hundreds of villages and towns. For twenty-four days the eyes of the country, the gaze of the whole world, was riveted on this extraordinary progress. As day by day passed the feelings of the whole nation were worked up to a tense pitch. The Press of the world recorded every detail and incident in the march. In the hundreds

of villages that they passed through the village headmen and patwaris resigned their posts. Hosts of villagers would merge themselves with the marching column. By the time they reached Dandi on 5th April the little group that had emerged out of Sabarmati Ashram had swelled into a non-violent army of several thousands. The next morning, on April 6th, after a bath in the sea, Gandhiji went solemnly up the sea-shore and picked up, in violation of the law, a pinch of salt from the beach. Precisely at that moment in tens of thousands of places all over the country small groups made salt and broke the law. By that act, it looked as if some inner Spirit in men had been liberated, as if some strange power had filled people's hearts which gave them the faith and courage to face mere physical force of the rulers. The people were in sore need of all the courage and faith they could get, because the Government which at first had been inclined to treat the whole proceeding lightly, saw the effect it produced in the country and was determined to use ruthless force to put it down. Unarmed volunteers were belaboured with lathis; no distinction was shown by the police between men and women, both being treated with equal inhumanity. In *Young India* of June 12th, 1930, Meera Ben, the English disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, gave a list of some of the forms of tortures perpetrated on Satyagrahis. It is hardly necessary to reproduce it.

The movement immediately spread all over Madhya Pradesh. On 6th April, the day Gandhiji broke the law at Dandi, a huge procession was organised at Jabalpur, led by Seth Govind Das and D. P. Mishra. It wended its way to the historic Samadhi of the warrior-queen Rani Durgavati, about thirteen miles from the city. There the assembled multitude took a solemn vow to carry the struggle for Independence to a successful conclusion. Batches of volunteers went forth and symbolically broke the salt law. On 8th April, Sihora, Katni, Mandla and Damoh witnessed the same spectacle. In hundreds of villages the ritual was performed with solemnity. On 16th April a Nagpur Pradesh War Council was formed at Nagpur with Abhyankar as President. Among the members were Jamanlal Bajaj, Mahatma Bhagwandin, Dr. Khare, Punamchand Ranka and Nilkanthrao Deshmukh. A batch of volunteers marched to Dahihanda in Berar and broke the salt law. A War Council was formed in Berar with Veer Waman Rao Joshi as the first president and Brijlal Biyani as Secretary. Every District Congress Committee was transformed into a War Committee. When Wamanrao Joshi, was arrested Bapuji Aney took over as president of the War Council. On 21st April a batch of lady volunteers led by Durgabai Joshi, broke the salt law.

The arrest of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on 13th April was, in a sense, related to events in Mahakoshal, because it was while he was boarding the train at Cheoki near Allahabad to go to Raipur to preside over the Hindi C. P. Provincial Conference that he was arrested and taken to Naini Central Jail. The conference, however, was held on 15th April as scheduled. Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, Chairman of the Reception Committee, made a reference to the arrest and observed that this action of Government must be treated as a challenge and should inspire their future action. Seth Govind Das who presided, in the absence of Jawaharlal Nehru, added that he was confident a fitting reply to the challenge would be given. It was at this Conference that the students of the "Anathalaya" of Raipur, smartly dressed in saffron uniforms, came on the platform and sang two inspiring songs which became later the marching song of the freedom struggle. These young volunteers formed a part of the Youth League of Raipur which had been organised into a remarkably disciplined force by Ravi Shankar Shukla. The Conference ended with the defying of the Salt Laws by five satyagrahis, Ravi Shankar Shukla, Seth Govind Das, D. P. Mishra, Mahant Laxminarayan Das and Gaya Charan Trivedi.

On return from the Raipur Conference the leaders of Jabalpur held a mass meeting in that city and broke the Salt Laws. The meeting provided an impressive demonstration of popular enthusiasm. Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla brought to this meeting those young volunteers of the Raipur "Anathalaya" who had thrilled the Raipur Conference. Standing on the platform facing the vast gathering they sang the famous song with full-throated gusto while the tens of thousands of people listened enthralled and uplifted. It is a song worth recording here.

### रणभेरी

(१)

उठो, उठो हे भारतवासी, ऋषियों की प्यारी संतान ।  
स्वतंत्रता के महासमर में, हो जाओ सहर्ष बलिदान ।  
उतरेगा जो आज समर में, वही वीर है मरदाना ।  
रणभेरी बज चुकी वीरवर, पहनो केशरिया बाना ॥

(२)

साठ बरस के बूढ़े गांधी, देव बड़े जाते हैं आज ।  
तुम को किन्तु युवक कहलाते, उर में तनिक न आती लाज ।  
इस विडम्बनामय जीवन से तो अच्छा है मर जाना ।  
रणभेरी बज चुकी वीरवर, पहनो केशरिया बाना ॥

But neither at Raipur nor at Jabalpur was Government inclined to arrest the Satyagrahis. The Mahakoshal Congress, therefore, sought other ways to force the hands of Government. The natural features of Madhya Pradesh, with its extensive forests, pointed to the violation of Forest Laws as an excellent form of Civil Disobedience. But as this had not been included in the programme defined by the Working Committee, it was necessary to obtain the approval of Motilal Nehru, who had been appointed President of the Congress on Jawaharlal's arrest. D. P. Mishra, who had been a trusted lieutenant of Motilal Nehru in the Legislative Assembly, immediately proceeded to Allahabad. Motilalji was reluctant to modify the programme without consulting Mahatma Gandhi who was far away at Dandi. He was apprehensive that a large-scale forest satyagraha involving thousands of adiwasis and villagers might result in violence. After a long discussion D. P. Mishra was able to persuade the President to agree to the programme and give it his blessing.

By the time D. P. Mishra returned to Jabalpur with this new weapon in his pocket, the Press had already given the news country-wide publicity. The Government of Central Provinces were now alarmed. If throughout the Province, nearly half the area of which was covered by forests, the people began violating the forest laws, the situation might well become uncontrollable. They therefore decided that the leaders should now be arrested at the earliest possible opportunity. Soon the opportunity came.

Though the Congress had sanctioned the breaking of Forest laws, it could be started only after setting up an efficient organization in the remote villages. In the meanwhile the leaders in Jabalpur decided to defy the Sedition Law by reading books proscribed by Government. On 20th April a large public meeting was held in Jabalpur at which Seth Govind Das, Dwaraka Prasad Mishra and others read selected portions from Pandit Sunderlal's "Bharat Me Angrezi Raj" which had been proscribed. This was the opportunity the Government were waiting for.

The long arm of the Police immediately stretched out and seized the leaders, one after the other. Seth Govind Das, D. P. Mishra and V. D. Bhargava were arrested in their houses. Makhanlal Chaturvedi who was staying with a friend in Jabalpur was also seized. Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla who was travelling to Balaghat was arrested on his way and was also brought to Jabalpur. They were all tried on three charges including sedition and four of them were sentenced to two years' rigorous imprison-

ment under each count, the sentences to run concurrently. V. D. Bhargava was awarded one year's rigorous imprisonment.

The reading of proscribed books became popular in other parts of the Province. In Nagpur M. V. Abhyankar read portions of a proscribed book in public and was arrested on 28th May. Veer Wamanrao Joshi was arrested earlier in the month at Amravati, for a seditious speech. They were both convicted under Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code and sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment. All these leaders now being behind the prison bars, it fell to Bapuji Aney to inaugurate the Forest Satyagraha on 10th July. With a party of volunteers he cut grass from the reserved forests at Pusad near Yeotmal and was arrested. At the same time other leaders of Berar, Brijlal Biyani, P. B. Gole, Shivaji Rao Patwardhan and Soman were arrested.

Forest Satyagraha now became the rage in every part of the State. In Betul Ghanshyam Singh Gupra and Deepchand Gorhi led the satyagraha and were arrested. It spread among the adiwasī population immediately and thousands of Gond men and women defied the forest laws. At Banjaridhal, in Betul district, the police opened fire on a crowd of about 500 Gonds injuring a large number. Another incident took place in Jambada where two satyagrahis were killed by police fire. It spread to the forests in the north where at Katni and Sehora the police attacked the forest satyagrahis and arrested a large number of them. At Rudri in Raipur district they were fired upon by the police. It spread rapidly in other places, at Talegaon, Wardha, Arvi, Katol and Kondhali.

The incident that occurred at Talegaon may be taken as a typical example. The first batch was led by Tikekar who in company with 28 volunteers left Nagpur on 24th July, travelling on foot and making halts at Gondkheri, Bajargaon, Kondhali, Thanegaon, Karanja, and Sarwadi, they reached the camp on the evening of 31st July. Early morning at 4-40 a.m. on the 1st August, the volunteers took their bath and went for a Darshan to the temple on a hillock near about and saluted the National Flag at sunrise. A crowd of 75,000 had gathered at the place to witness this Satyagraha. The entire valley near about was thronged with spectators on all sides. On the hillock in front, the District Superintendent of Police, the Forest Officers with policemen and Forest guards were present in strength. The procession of volunteers reached the forest boundary at 8-30 a.m. and handed over to the officers the Working Committee's resolution No. 6 asking Govern-

ment servants to stop serving a foreign Government. The officials in turn asked the volunteers if they had obtained passes to enter Government forest. The reply was of course in the negative. The volunteers thereafter entered the forest and started cutting grass. The entire valley resounded with deafening cries of national slogans as soon as the volunteers started their satyagraha. As the volunteers returned, batches of them were arrested and sent to Nagpur in a police van. Altogether nearly 500 volunteers were arrested in this incident.

Another issue for satyagraha was the boycott of General Elections. On 10th November polling was in progress, and volunteers began picketing the polling centres. In Nagpur about 400 men and 200 women volunteers assisted by nearly 500 boys spread themselves among all the polling centres asking people not to vote. Among those arrested was Shrimati Anasuya Bai Kale who was picketing the Town Hall centre. The satyagraha was a great success as only 1,137 voters out of a total of about 25,000 in the city gave their votes. The picketing of distilleries and liquor-shops was another aspect of the movement which also resulted in numerous arrests. An effective method adopted by Satyagrahis to stop sale of liquor was to prevent the carts or motor vehicles carrying the stock from leaving the ware-houses. On 19th July a large group of volunteers picketed the ware-houses in Jabalpur which brought the angry police on the scene. As the truck loaded with the barrels attempted to move one of the volunteers, Nana Naidu, lay flat on the road in front of the truck, and refused to budge. Finding the volunteers adamant in their resolve the police opened fire injuring four of them. Later in the year the ware-houses in Saoner, in Nagpur district, were similarly picketed. The volunteers felled the road-side trees and completely blocked the roads preventing the trucks from proceeding. There was a severe lathi charge by the police at this place seriously injuring many of the volunteers.

An incident that happened at Turiya in Seoni district is typical of the hysterical manner in which the police behaved. One Muka Lohar and his followers announced that they would break the forest laws by cutting grass at a place called Khawasa on 9th October. The police at once marshalled their forces and about a dozen armed constables with an Inspector proceeded to the site accompanied by a range officer. The Deputy Commissioner Seoni had sent a chit to the Inspector in great annoyance saying, "I had thought that Turiya had been taught a lesson". The Inspector took the hint. Roving round the forest they could not come across the party of



satyagrahis and they returned to their camp. At that moment about 400 villagers and Adivasis came towards the camp as they heard that their leader, Muka Lohar, had been arrested by the police. Some people in the crowd, no doubt, had with them sickles with which grass was to be cut, but they were clearly non-violent and had not attacked the police party. But the constables were only waiting for the crowd and as soon as they saw this large crowd advancing towards them, they became panicky and opened fire killing three women and one man and injuring about 30 others.

To deal with the youths and students who joined the struggle and also to intimidate the adiwasis who played a great part in Forest satyagraha, the Central Provinces Government adopted the punishment of whipping. Since early August this brutal form of punishment became very popular with the authorities. Fines they found difficult to collect; imprisonment required them to provide accommodation, howsoever filthy. But whipping did away with both these problems and, besides, gave them a sadistic pleasure. From August to December, 164 persons were tortured in this way. It is significant that when appeals were preferred against this form of punishment the Sessions Judge at Buldana set aside the sentence in twenty cases, while in Raipur the Judge substituted the punishment of imprisonment in place of whipping in six cases. But many others who scorned to go in appeal bravely suffered.

The remarkable manner in which popular sentiment was awakened is illustrated by the activities of the 'Vijaya Ashram' at Arvi. It was a training centre of youths who did excellent work in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In picketing of liquor-shops and persuading people not to take part in the polling these volunteers were adepts. The method of punishing them popular with the magistrates, as described above, was by ordering whipping. There are instances in which, while the constable inflicted the punishment the gallant youths shouted 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai' at every stroke of the whip. This Ashram which was under the management of Vallabh Das Jaju, Jamanadas Deokisandas and Babasaheb Deshmukh, used to act a play called 'Bhagat Singh Ki Fansi', a play which was extremely popular among the villagers. The most stirring feature of it was a song which the boy, acting the part of Bhagat Singh, used to sing, addressed to his mother, who, in fact, stood for Mother India.

In order to strengthen the hands of repression all the special powers which Government of India had placed at the disposal of the Executive were introduced in this province also. The Press Ordi-

nance came into force on 27th April. Under this Ordinance securities were demanded from a number of nationalist papers who naturally refused to give it. Thus *Lokmat*, and *Koshal Samachar* of Jabalpur, *Udaya* of Amravati, *Yugantar*, *Karmavir*, *Swatantra Hindustan* ceased publication. The earlier *Tarun Bharat* of Nagpur had also ceased publication. The Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance, directed against picketing was introduced in July. By the end of October, 308 persons were dealt with under this Ordinance in Nagpur alone.

While Madhya Pradesh was thus stirred from one end to the other by this mighty mass movement, great events were piling one upon another in the rest of the country. We have seen how Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested on his way to Raipur. He nominated his father, Motilal Nehru, to succeed him as President of the Congress. When Motilal Nehru was arrested on June 30th, Sardar Patel took over from him; and so on, the leadership was passed from hand to hand as each was sent to the prison. One remarkable feature of all these unparalleled events was that throughout it had been wholly non-violent. Gandhiji had said that only those should undertake 'satyagraha' who believed in the principle of non-violence. This Revolution had indeed proved to be truly non-violent. The nation had taken ten years to learn the spirit and principle of Gandhiji's technique, and there was no second Chauri-Chaura. The weeks that followed the first outburst of non-violent satyagraha were so crowded with events, each more startling than the other, that it is difficult to keep track of them all. In the Legislative Assembly the few remaining Nationalists also walked out, led by Pandit Malaviya. This was followed by the resignation of President V. J. Patel who, in a letter to the Viceroy, said that after the resignation of the Congress Party and the Nationalist Party of Pandit Malaviya, the Assembly had lost its representative character, and he felt his own place now was with his people.

Till now Government had refrained from laying their hands on Gandhiji. They had been held back by the fear that Gandhi arrested might be more powerful than Gandhi free. But bureaucracy now decided to take the desperate step. On the night of May 4th, a little past midnight, the District Magistrate of Surat with a posse of constables went to the little village near Dandi where Gandhiji had his camp, and turned on the flash-light on the sleeping face of Gandhiji. Unceremoniously Gandhiji was told that he was under arrest. It was under an obsolete Bombay Ordinance of 1827 that Government had chosen to arrest him. He was taken to Yeravada Jail in Poona which, six years ago, he had left

after his operation. But this time there was to be no trial. On the arrest of Gandhiji the leadership of the campaign was taken over by Abbas Tyabji. When he too was arrested on 12th May, Sarojini Naidu stepped in, but she too was arrested on 21st May, and others took command, one after the other, in an almost unending succession. The roll of arrested persons mounted up. By the end of the year more than sixty-thousand satyagrahis were locked up. The prisons overflowed, temporary jails were put up; they too could not hold the ever growing numbers of patriots.

Repression went side by side with Ordinances. The first of these issued on 27th April, gagged all nationalist papers. Another Ordinance made picketing a crime. All Congress Committees were declared "Unlawful Assemblies". As many as nine Ordinances had been issued by October, 1930. Into this sea of unrest was dropped the Simon Report---a thing which had been dead even before it was born. Even a Legislative Assembly shorn of all Congress and Nationalist members had no kind word for it. It was obvious that on the basis of the Report there was little possibility of satisfying even the most loyal section in India. Therefore, all hopes were now pinned on the Round Table Conference. Madhya Pradesh had one representative on it in S. B. Tambe. His place as Member of the Executive Council was taken by Dr. Raghavendra Rao.

From the outset it was clear that in the absence of the Congress, the Round Table Conference was like "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark. If it was the intention of Government to demonstrate to the world the diversity of opinion in India they could not have chosen a more heterogenous team. The few nationalist members like Pandit Malaviya, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, M. R. Jayakar and Srinivas Sastri soon found the rabid atmosphere thoroughly unjust to India. Even the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald and the Secretary of State were conscious of the utter unreality of a situation in which while the fate of India was being discussed her noblest sons and daughters were being locked up in jails or belaboured on the streets. Out of this feeling was born the effort to bring the Congress into the Conference.

Some important leaders of the Liberal Party played an earnest part in this effort. Many others claimed a share in it. An English journalist, George Slocombe, tried his hand at top-level negotiations. But in fact there was no need for any high diplomacy in the matter. Gandhiji had always been ready and willing to talk matters over. If his friendly overture of March 2nd had

not been curtly rebuffed by the Viceroy, if Government had chosen to consider the eleven points formulated by him on January 30th, as a basis for discussions, the march of events would have been different. Now that the situation had become impossible for the British, they were in a more receptive mood. Messengers ran between Yeravada and Delhi. Motilal Nehru who had been seriously ill in prison was suddenly released on 8th September. From his sick-bed he too assisted in the negotiations. Prior to this, consultations had been held in Yeravada Prison itself where Government had transferred all the members of the Congress Working Committee from their different jails.

While these discussions and negotiations were dragging on endlessly, the Round Table Conference met on 12th November. While the voice of India was nowhere to be heard, each sectarian group put forth its own special demands: the emphasis was all on safeguards, reservations, special treatment. Meanwhile even the British politicians were becoming somewhat indifferent about the conference, because English politics had begun to preoccupy them, and the position of the Labour Party was becoming insecure. In the perspective of History it is possible to see that the Round Table Conference was indeed meaningless. But it was not so clear then. Hurriedly Ramsay Macdonald concluded the Conference on 19th January, 1931, after having delivered a long sermon in which he expressed the hope that "by our labours together India will come to possess the only thing she lacks to give her the status of a dominion amongst the British Commonwealth of Nations—the responsibilities and the cares, the burdens and the difficulties, but also the pride and the honour of responsible self-government". He concluded his speech by saying that "steps would be taken to enlist the co-operation of those sections of public opinion which had held aloof from the Conference".

The British Prime Minister's speech was meant to open the door for negotiations with the Congress. So, at any rate, it was widely interpreted. The Liberal leaders cabled immediately from London to Motilal Nehru saying, "Starting tomorrow. Meanwhile earnestly beg you to postpone decision till we meet". Before they reached India the Viceroy ordered the unconditional release of Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the Congress Working Committee "in order to provide an opportunity for considering the statement made by the Prime Minister on January 19th". They all proceeded to Allahabad where Motilal Nehru was lying ill. Here too came the Round Table Conference Delegates, Sapru,

Jayakar and Sastri, to give the Congress leaders their impression of the Conference. According to them it appeared that if Congress did not join the Conference the partisan interests represented there—the Princes, extreme communalists and other reactionary forces—would so firmly entrench themselves that a freedom struggle later may turn out to be in the nature of a civil war. Gandhiji listened to all this silently, and when the Liberal leaders suggested that he should have a talk with Lord Irwin, he readily agreed. But before the interview took place on 17th February, the Nation had been bereaved of one of her greatest sons. Pandit Motilal Nehru passed away on 6th February. Gandhiji was stricken with sorrow. "My position is worse than a widow's. By a faithful life she can appropriate the merits of her husband: I can appropriate nothing; what I have lost through Motilalji's death is a loss for ever."

Under the shadow of this grief the Gandhi-Irwin talks were held. It is not necessary to go into the intricacies of these negotiations. They began at 2.30 p.m. on 17th February and continued, with some interruptions, till 5th March. Britain and India watched these conversations with diverse feelings. To Churchill it was a "nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's place, there to negotiate and to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor". To India it appeared an unnecessary and futile courtesy forced upon Gandhiji partly by his own principles and partly by the importunity of friends. The talks prolonged punctuated by waves of hopelessness and faith, with frequent consultations with other Congress leaders by Gandhiji and with British Government by Lord Irwin. At last, the long document of the Agreement—commonly referred to as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact—was published in a *Gazette of India* Extraordinary on March 5th. Not bothering to go through the rigmarole of official draftsmanship, the common people only saw in the Pact that the Civil Disobedience was to be given up, prisoners were to be released, salt manufacture permitted in coastal places, and that Congress was to be represented in the next Round Table Conference. The common people also saw another fact: a little more than a fortnight after the Agreement was gazetted, the accused in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, were executed on 23rd March ignoring the persistent public demand for commutation of the death sentences. It looked as if Government were waiting for the satisfactory conclusion of the talks with Gandhiji before carrying out the sentence in defiance of the people's demand. Having had to parley with Gandhiji Govern-

ment perhaps wished to rehabilitate their "prestige" by a merciless act which flouted public opinion.

The Karachi Congress which met a week after Bhagat Singh's execution was naturally a tense and excited gathering. The younger generation particularly, which had looked upon Bhagat Singh as a symbol of the re-awakened Youth of India was filled with anger. They were inclined to blame Gandhiji's truce for the fate that befell Bhagat Singh. In this hostile atmosphere the Congress met, with Sardar Patel as President. It was one of Mahatma's Gandhi's amazing triumphs that he was able to convince the Congress and convert it to an acceptance of the Agreement. In a marvellous forty-five minutes' speech he won over the gathering of fifty-thousand people to his view. The Resolution accepting the Delhi Pact was adopted almost unanimously, only about ten hands being raised against its adoption. The Working Committee of the Congress, which met later on 2nd April decided to appoint Mahatma Gandhi as its sole delegate to the next Round Table Conference. But the events that took place in India between this decision and his sailing were hardly propitious signs. Complaints began to pour in about the grudging and even hostile manner in which the Government machinery in many parts of the country was carrying out the terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. By the middle of April Lord Irwin left India and was succeeded by Lord Wellington as Viceroy. He obviously did not take that interest in the Agreement which his predecessor, the joint author of it, had taken. By August Gandhiji had been driven to such an extremity that he bluntly refused to go to the Conference in such circumstances. It was clear that against this back-ground the Conference was doomed to failure.

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE FAILURE OF A CONFERENCE

Towards the close of 1930 British Government appeared to be anxious to bring the Congress into the Round Table Conference. How else could they save their face and the Conference? Whatever the decision the Conference might arrive at there would not be the least chance of implementing it if the Congress were not a party to it. Hence Ramsay Macdonald's Government in England and Lord Irwin in India were eager to placate the Congress and persuade it to come in. Gandhiji took them at their word and, as mentioned earlier, by the power of his personality he got the Congress to agree to join the Round Table Conference. Once the purpose was achieved the tone of the Government began to change. Irwin was replaced by Willingdon, and in India House, Wedgwood Benn was replaced by Sir Samuel Hoare. Though Ramsay Macdonald still headed the National Government in England it was, in all but name, a Conservative Government.

These changes found expression in the policy of Government of India and the Provincial Governments. Complaints began to pour in from Bardoli that the terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact were not being observed by Government. Confiscated property of peasants was not promptly returned. Delays, obviously deliberate, occurred in the release of political prisoners. There were protests in Amravati that Vir Wamanrao Joshi and M. V. Abhyankar were not released. The District Magistrate, Amravati, informed the Chief Secretary to Government at Nagpur that "considerable dissatisfaction was expressed at the failure up-to-date to release the two persons convicted in this district under section 124-A. These are Mr. M. V. Abhyankar of Nagpur and Mr. Wamanrao Joshi. Both, I understand, are at present in Seoni jail. There is an impression locally that they have not been released because they were convicted of sedition".

In other ways too the bureaucracy exhibited its reactionary attitude. On 23rd September the Commissioner of Jabalpur wrote to the Chief Secretary to Government objecting to the singing of a popular national flag song by students. The Governor noted on this subject saying "I consider it objectionable that this song should be sung in the schools". He then added, rather sadly, "but the weak point is that no parent has as yet taken any objection". The song which was the subject of all this discussion had



long become a part of the people's life, and was sung by the tiller at his work and the urchin in the village lanes. No official fiat could now suppress it.

In many other ways, in small things as well as in great, official tendency to balk the Pact was visible everywhere. Gandhiji himself collected evidence and handed over to the Home Secretary personally a "charge sheet" of breaches of the Pact by officers. By early August, as mentioned earlier, Gandhiji was so oppressed by these acts that he refused to attend the Conference in London. The authorities in London now began to wake up. Their plans would fail if Gandhiji was not present at the Conference. The Viceroy was told about it. He invited Gandhiji for further negotiations, and promised to inquire into the specific complaints of breaches of the Pact. A settlement was somehow arrived at, and Gandhiji had to take a special train from Delhi to be in time to catch the boat that sailed on the 29th August. He arrived in London on September 12th, but the Conference had already begun on the 7th September.

But, by now, events had taken such a course that the Conference had ceased to have any meaning. The British statesmen and even the British people had lost all interest in it. A major economic and political crisis overshadowed every thing else for them. To save the country's finances Britain had to go off the Gold Standard on the 21st September: and a fortnight later Parliament was dissolved. A furious election campaign followed which resulted in a decisive victory for the National Government with a preponderating Conservative element. There were very few changes in the Cabinet, the only notable one being the appointment of Sir John Simon at the Foreign Office in place of Lord Reading.

The Round Table Conference dragged on its weary existence as a matter of mere formality. It was altogether a depressing spectacle. The Princes, Muslims, Landlords, the Scheduled Caste leader Dr. Ambedkar, the Anglo-Indians, non-Brahmins, British puppets, all wrangling among themselves about ratios, proportions, safeguards, while the lonely figure of Gandhiji, wrapped-up in his shawl, sat aloof and mostly silent, after having delivered to the Conference the message which he had brought from the Congress. He saw at once the utter futility of it all: between his high ideal and self-effacing patriotism and the cynical self-seeking of many others in the Conference there was an unbridgeable gulf. No wonder the Conference was not only a failure but a fiasco. The miserable

draft of a Constitution that emerged from it, with its Minorities' pact and weightage to the Indian States, was a sheer mockery. The "long, slow agony" of the Conference, as Gandhiji put it, came at last to an end on the 1st December 1931. Mahatmaji left London on 6th December, and after spending some time in Europe, landed in Bombay on 28th December, to face a Government which had decided on ruthless repression.

Willington was determined to prove that he was made of sterner stuff than his predecessor. In this delectable task he was aided by the reactionary British Commercial interests. A good example of their attitude is provided by a letter addressed to Bombay Government by the Secretary of the Bombay Branch of the European Association. On 15th October 1931, he wrote to the Home Department of Bombay thus :

"I am now to invite Government's attention to another subject, which is of great importance, not only to the community represented by this Association, but to the country at large. My Committee realise that it is not always possible for Government to disclose their policy, but members of the Branch are continually asking if, in the event of a recrudescence of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Government are going to take firm and immediate action, and I am, therefore, directed to put before you certain suggestions for the consideration of Government.

"In the first place, my Committee wish to urge upon Government a recognition of the undoubted fact that, if unhappily Civil Disobedience should again break out, it could only be regarded as a direct challenge to Government, which must inevitably end either in the suppression of Congress, or in the overthrow of Government. The latter, it is to be hoped, may be dismissed as inconceivable, but only if Government make all other considerations subordinate to the need for prompt and decisive measures against the movement the moment it reappears. There will be no room for doubt as to its object, and an attitude of conciliation will be tantamount to suicide. The greater the latitude permitted, the longer and the more bitter will be the struggle, and the worse the suffering. It cannot be too strongly urged upon Government that, if the revolutionary movement again gets under way, their action must be prompt, vigorous, and even ruthless. Congress must be given no time for the full mobilization of its undoubtedly powerful forces.

"If it is permitted to this Committee to make specific suggestions in this regard, the following are some of the lines on which this Committee recommends that Government should work:

- (1) That immediately Civil Disobedience was declared, Congress should be declared as illegal body, and Congress property and property used for Congress purposes, should be confiscated, and at once sold or destroyed.
- (2) That flying of the Congress flag, and all kinds of ceremonial connected therewith, should immediately be forbidden.
- (3) That similar action should be taken in regard to parading or drilling of volunteers and similar operations of a military nature.
- (4) That all those who are known to have been responsible for the organisation of financing of the last Civil Disobedience Movement, should be at once brought under control and, if necessary, put under restraint. It is suggested, in fact, that they should be treated in the same fashion as enemy subjects interned during the war.
- (5) That provision should be made to prevent any persons or bodies from deriving financial benefits as a result of political upheaval. Both regulations might be compared with those adopted in the United Kingdom against profiteering during the war. Two specific methods by which it is suggested that such provision might be made effective, are:
  - (a) That steps should be taken to stop Congress Funds at the source, accompanied, if necessary, by an Ordinance compelling the production of Banking Accounts.
  - (b) that textile mills or other commercial undertakings which have signed agreement with Congress, while that body has not been prescribed as illegal, should be required immediately to withdraw adherence to any compact with Congress on pain of being denied rail transit for their goods. Something of this kind would appear to be vital, one of the terms accepted by, at any rate, some of these

signatories being an undertaking to give Government no assistance in any action which they may take against so-called national activities.

The policy adopted by Government during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1932, shows how faithfully they had accepted these suggestions. Never since the days of the East India Company did one come across the outrageous spectacle of a commercial body of foreigners laying down the policy and the Government accepting it so completely.

Government professed that they had fulfilled the terms of the Delhi Pact, and at the same time issued circulars to Provincial Governments asking them to supply whatever evidence could be obtained to prove that the Congress was not abiding by the terms. It was easy enough for Governments to produce evidence to prove any case: they had a way of getting it. So, it was proclaimed by high dignitaries that it was Congress which had gone back on the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Speaking at the inauguration of the Autumn Session of the Central Provinces Legislature the Governor, Sir Montagu Butler, referred to the bad start given to the Pact all over the province by Congressman misrepresenting it as a truce and not permanent peace, and he accused the Congress of fostering the war mentality, as he called it. The fact, however, was that bureaucracy refused to impart into the carrying out of the terms of the Pact any sincere effort for peace. For instance, on 7th April, 1931, just a month after the Pact had been signed the Secretary of the Mahakoshal Congress Committee, D. P. Mishra, wrote to the Chief Secretary saying that he had been authorised by his Committee "to put himself in touch with the Government in order to give effect to the Delhi Settlement so far as the fourteen Hindi speaking districts of this Province were affected by it". The Chief Secretary's comment on this move was, "I think we should merely acknowledge formally". The Home Member also concurred in the view and said "I agree nothing beyond formal acknowledgment" was necessary. There they dropped the matter. This is fairly representative of the way bureaucracy dealt with the implementation of the terms of the Pact. What had happened was that the regime of Willingdon was not at all happy about the Pact. The Conservative Party in England, which now dominated the National Government, was also anxious to get out of the agreement which the pious Christian, Lord Irwin, had brought about.

Having assumed this frame of mind the Government was happy to take advantage of a series of political murders that occurred in Bengal and some other parts of the country at this time, and in the name of establishing law and order launch a reign of terror. When the Bombay Governor visited Ferguson College in July 1931, a student fired two revolver shots at him which luckily did not wound him. In the same month the District and Sessions Judge of Alipore, was shot dead while he was sitting in his Court room. In August the Police Inspector, a Muslim, who had carried out the investigations in the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case, was shot dead. This was followed by a horrible rioting in which the Hindus were terrorised and plundered, which the local officers apparently did nothing to control. A non-official enquiry committee which reported on the events at Chittagong made serious charges against the local authorities. They said that the European officials and non-officials and the Mohammadan police were in league in all the attacks on the Hindus, that looting was carried on under police protection and that the disturbances in mofussil places were started under orders of the local authorities.

This type of official terrorism added fuel to revolutionary activity. The District Magistrate of Dacca was shot dead while he was shopping. The President of the European Association in Calcutta was shot at, but he fortunately escaped with a minor wound. These crimes were followed, in December 1931, by the Commilla outrage when two girls, students of the local high school, shot dead District Magistrate Stevens in his house. Government met the situation by promulgating the Bengal Ordinance and carrying out wholesale searches and arrests.

Also in our parts of the country, particularly in the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier Province, the situation worsened. There was widespread failure of crops and a wave of trade depression. In Madhya Pradesh there was an exceptionally bad harvest. Agriculturists in Nagpur, Berar and Chhattisgarh demanded remission of land revenue. The President of the Buldana District Agricultural Association complained that the crop reports of Government were highly exaggerated and gave a wholly incorrect picture of the condition of the crops. The result was that the tax demands were far in excess of the capacity of the cultivators. Agrarian discontent grew in the United Provinces owing to the steep fall in prices. There was a demand for remission of taxes and the Congress took up the cause of the peasants. Government's attitude was wholly unsympathetic. A no-tax campaign

was started by the Congress, and Government replied by issuing an Ordinance similar to the one promulgated in Bengal. The Allahabad Congress offices and Anand Bhawan were searched. Purushottam Das Tandon and K. K. Malaviya were arrested on 20th December, and Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested on 26th while he was on his way to Bombay to receive Gandhiji.

Thus, by the time the Round Table Conference came to a close, India was in the grip of a ruthless repression. This was the India that Gandhiji saw when he landed in Bombay on 28th December. He was immediately closeted with the Working Committee, and on the following day sent a telegram to the Viceroy pointing out the unhelpful nature of the rule by Ordinances. The reply was not from the Viceroy but his Private Secretary who, after indulging in the usual official pomposities, said that "His Excellency feels bound to emphasise that he will not be prepared to discuss with you the measures which the Government of India with the full approval of His Majesty's Government have found it necessary to adopt in Bengal, the United Provinces and the North-West Frontier Province. These measures must, in any case, be kept in force until they have served the purpose for which they were imposed, namely, the preservation of law and order essential to good government". Not only did Willingdon refuse to see Gandhiji, but the letter ended with a threat that "His Excellency and his Government can hardly believe that you or the Working Committee contemplate that His Excellency can invite you with the hope of any advantage to an interview held under the threat of the resumption of Civil Disobedience. They must hold you and the Congress responsible for all consequences". This was the undisguised mailed fist which Willingdon could now display safely having got Gandhiji's presence at the Round Table Conference. Government was now out to use all their might against the Congress.

The Government was determined, this time, not to give the chance to the Congress to organise a campaign. All its weapons were kept ready: its plan was also complete in every detail. Only the signal had to be given. The reply of the Viceroy to the friendly and even conciliatory approach of Gandhiji was deliberate and designed to provoke the Congress into opposition. "The Government of India cannot accept the position implied in your telegram that its policy should be dependent on the judgment of yourself as to the necessity of measures which the Government has taken." The tone was meant to give offence. But the Congress, conscious of its responsibility, took counsel before taking a decision. The

Working Committee met on 1st January 1932 at Bombay and adopted a resolution according to which "The Committee is prepared to render co-operation to Government provided the Viceroy reconsiders his Thursday's telegram to Mahatma Gandhi. . . .". In case no such response was received from Government, the Working Committee would call upon the nation to resume Civil Disobedience.

This was treated by Government as a threat and the signal was given for putting in motion the whole machinery of repression, already prepared and kept in readiness. A long memorandum stating the Government case was released from Delhi on 4th January, and the next day Gandhiji and the other members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested. Every Provincial Government had already made a list of those to be seized, and it was easy enough for them to strike at once and clap them all in jails. All Congress organizations were declared unlawful. Various other youth organizations were banned. By 11th January the Unlawful Association Ordinance, the Molestation and Boycotting Ordinance, and the Unlawful Instigation Ordinance had been put into force in Madhya Pradesh. General instructions had been issued regarding the seizing of the property and funds of all these organizations, infliction and realisation of fines in the case of persons arrested for Civil Disobedience and the methods for "cleaning-up", as the official phrase went, of various towns where the Congress was powerful. Among the organizations other than the Congress declared unlawful at the very outset were the Nawa Jawan Bharat-Sabha of Jabalpur and the Asahayoga Ashram of Nagpur. On 12th January a notification was issued in Nagpur, prohibiting the newspapers from publishing any matter relating to Civil Disobedience.

All these measures followed in quick succession, allowing the leaders no time to give a proper start to the movement. Nevertheless the Congress bodies in the various districts quickly reacted with courage. All the Provincial and District Congress Committees were dissolved, and in their places War Councils were formed with a Dictator and Secretary for each. They were, Seth Govind Das and D. P. Mishra in Mahakoshal, Waman Rao Joshi and Brijlal Biyani in Berar, and M. V. Abhyankar and Punam Chand Ranka in Nagpur.

Protest meetings were held at many places to condemn the arrest of Gandhiji and the other leaders. The meetings were dispersed by the police and the leaders arrested. In Nagpur, Government insisted on imposing excessive fines on M. V. Abhyankar.

The Governor remarked that a 'purse' of about Rs. 15,000 had been recently presented to Abhyankar and added, "We should ask for a share of his 'purse' as fine". The Governor did not realize that these 'purses' go to the party's funds. At Wardha and Hinganghat, the police attacked groups of demonstrators. On 16th February there was again a serious lathi charge at Wardha. The Legislative Council, in spite of the weakness of the opposition, succeeded in passing an adjournment motion by T. J. Kedar condemning the police action.

Another problem that faced the Central Provinces Government was the increasing number of women who were taking part in picketing and other demonstrations. Instructions were issued to local officers that the women should be fined heavily. "If husbands learn that the conduct of their wives involves them in pecuniary loss, they may be more inclined to exercise restraint". Therefore Government told their officers that in cases where a woman is 'first offender' and her financial status warranted a substantial fine, it should be imposed and it may not be necessary to press for a longer term of imprisonment than would enable the fine to be collected. Another problem which worried Government regarding women satyagrahis was how to deal with them effectively while they were picketing. One ingenious method was suggested: "One method that I have long been considering is to make use of untouchables (females whenever possible) for dealing with women picketers. Picketing by women and participation by women in demonstrations I regard as a very grave menace, unless some method of dealing with it can be devised, I consider that the experiment with the untouchables is well worth making. The Congress party with its professed affection and sympathy for this class can hardly raise objections. The depressed classes look to the Government to champion their interests, and the enlisting of their assistance in the maintenance of order would be a measure tending to their uplift". Inscrutable were the workings of official mind and the suppression of Congress and the uplift of the depressed classes were sought to be achieved at one stroke!

A third problem which faced Government was the possibility of Muslims joining the agitation against Government on the occasion of observing the "Frontier Day" as a protest against the shooting of the Red Shirts of North West Frontier Province. Government of India informed the Central Provinces Government along with other Provincial Governments, that "it is reported that the Working Committee of the Muslim Conference at a meeting held in Delhi passed a resolution of which the general effect was to



condemn the action of the Government in the North West Frontier Province. They further call on the Muslims of India to observe the last Friday of Ramzan as "Frontier Day" for demonstration of sympathy . . . . The question, therefore, arises as to the policy to be pursued in regard to demonstrations on that day. Alternatives appear to be (a) to forbid demonstrations and to disperse assemblies, if necessary, (b) not to interfere with demonstrations or assemblies unless they involve a positive danger of a breach of the peace". Government then discussed the merits of these alternatives and decided that the first course might throw into the arms of the Congress those Muslims "who generally speaking are friendly disposed towards Government and opposed to Civil Disobedience". Therefore, they adopted the second course. Muslim gatherings and demonstrations were left alone by the police, while the groups of Congress picketers and satyagrahis were beaten, belaboured and sent to jails.

The amazing fact was that in spite of the ruthless measures adopted by Government, and the suddenness with which they had swooped down on the Congress, the Civil Disobedience Movement persisted with undiminished vigour. According to official figures the number of arrests in January was 14,800; but in February it rose to 17,800. The Viceroy had declared that he would crush the Civil Disobedience Movement within six weeks. But even as late as in March the movement was raging vigorously. The reason partly was that it was a spontaneous mass movement and therefore the villagers and the common people carried it forward even in the absence of the leaders.

In Jabalpur the movement began in a unique way. A public meeting was held at Tilak Maidan at which Seth Govind Das and D. P. Mishra were present. They knew that if any speeches were made they would be arrested, but they did not wish to be arrested before some instructions could be passed on to workers to continue the struggle. Therefore they decided that it would be a "dumb" meeting. Thousands of persons kept squatting on the ground night and day and no speeches were delivered. People not only from the city but from distant villages came to the gathering and went back with instructions. Worship of the Flag was arranged at which offerings were brought by thousands of people, and thus, Funds were collected to keep up the movement. After having given it a start in this manner, on the fourth day the meeting formed itself into a procession, was lathi-charged, and Seth Govind Das, D. P. Mishra, Laxmansingh Chauhan and Baba Hiralal were

arrested. The first two were sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment and fines of Rs. 2,000 and Rs. 1,500 respectively, while Laxmansingh Chauhan got six months and Baba Hiralal nine months, in addition to a fine of hundred rupees each. Most of the newspapers which published a Message to the people were promptly suspended. Among these were *Lokmat* of Jabalpur, *Matru Bhumi* of Akola, *Udaya* of Amravati and *Lokmat* of Yeotmal.

The gagging Ordinance on the Press and seizure of numerous printing presses led to the adoption of ingenious methods for circulating the Congress bulletins. Cyclostyling machines were installed in most unsuspected places, in the houses of some persons who were considered to be beyond all Government suspicion. The bulletins were circulated among the people through unusual channels and the movement was thus sustained. Volunteers poured in to take the places of those carried away by the police, and the work of boycott and picketing went on uninterrupted. The 'Independence Day' was observed on 26th January leading to numerous arrests. The National Week was observed from 6th to 13th April and Congress bulletins gave details of the programme to be followed on each day. Forest satyagraha was revived in Betul and Wardha districts. It was during the National Week that a procession led by the revered widow of Motilal Nehru at Allahabad was forcibly dispersed by the Police. Shrimati Motilal Nehru was among those seriously injured. The whole country was filled with indignation by this inhumanity. All these followed the normal pattern and in spite of intimidation and arrests, created widespread enthusiasm.

In the midst of this orgy of repression it was decided to hold the annual session of the Congress at Delhi, on the 24th April. The President-elect Pandit Malaviya was arrested as soon as he entered Delhi defying the ban served on him earlier. Delegates to the session went to Delhi from many parts of the country by devious routes in order to evade arrest. At 9 o'clock in the morning they assembled in front of the Clock-tower at Chandni Chauk with Ranchordas Amritlal as President. All the speeches and addresses were circulated, and five resolutions were adopted by the Congress. Just then a party of police appeared on the scene, cordoned the whole gathering and arrested every one present.

This was followed by a joint conference of the Mahakhosal. Nagpur and Vidarbha Congress at Nagpur, on the 29th May. The President chosen was Ghanshyam Singh Gupta, but he was arrested before the date of the conference. Thakur Chhedilal took his

place and presided over the meeting. There were about 300 delegates present. Just as the President started reading his address he and the whole gathering were arrested and later sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

The movement received an accession of strength when the working classes decided to join it. A mass meeting was held in Nagpur in February in which textile workers, railwaymen and a union of tonga drivers took part. The labour leaders R. S. Ruikar and Kalappa urged the workers to join in the protest against the repressive Ordinances and rally round the trade Union Congress in this agitation. Soon after, Ruikar was arrested. Together with the labour, the youth movement also played a prominent part. The Mahakhosal Nava Jawan Sabha met at Sagar when Yusuf Meharali, a youth leader from Bombay, exhorted the youths to keep up the battle until Government realised the need to yield to the national demand.

Having put all the leaders in jail, Government appeared to feel that it was necessary further to terrorise them by brutal treatment. The affairs in Amravati and Raipur jails became particularly notorious. Harvey who came to Amravati jail as Superintendent on the 19th April began a series of atrocities which roused the whole province and even the outside world. Some prisoners were kept in solitary cells for three days, with neither food nor water, and were then taken out and beaten. In Raipur jail some prisoners who asked for Khadi clothes were whipped; others were tortured in many ways and kept in solitary cells. The Central Provinces Legislative Council debated an adjournment motion on this issue. The press and the public protested. But Government was determined to break the spirit of the people.

The position by the end of April 1932, is well summed up by Pandit Malaviya :

“During these four months up to April 20th last, according to the reports published in the Press, 66,646 persons, among whom were included 5,325 women and many children, have been arrested imprisoned and humiliated. This could not possibly include arrests in the far-off villages in the interior of the country and, therefore, the Congress estimates the total arrests to be over 80,000 up to that date. The jails are overcrowded and ordinary prisoners are being released before their time to make room for political prisoners. To this has to be added the number of arrests made during the last ten days including those of the delegates to the Delhi Congress.

According to the reports in the Press, firing has been resorted to in at least 29 cases with considerable loss of life. There have been lathi charges on unarmed crowds at 325 places. There have been 663 cases of house searches and 102 cases of confiscation of property. A general policy has been pursued of imposing extraordinarily heavy fines on person who have been convicted in connection with the movement and property far in excess of what was necessary for realising the amount of the fines, has been attached and sold. The Press has been gagged as it has never been gagged before. 193 cases have been reported where the newspapers and public presses have been regulated by orders for confiscation, demands for security and consequent closing down of the presses, warnings, searches and arrests of editors, printers or keepers. Numerous public meetings and processions of non-violent men and women have been dispersed by lathi charges, and sometimes by firing."

By the end of August several factors combined to lower the tempo of the movement throughout the country. Fierce communal clashes broke out in Bombay in May and continued with intermittent fury for nearly six weeks. The repression in Bengal, mass arrests in U.P., Central Provinces and elsewhere, the appalling trade depression—all contributed to the weariness of the people. The use of fire-arms by police in dispersing crowds during 1932 was something unprecedented, and was perhaps equalled only by another orgy of oppression ten years later.

In this state of spiritual depression occurred an event which at once acted as an elixir to awaken the soul of the Nation. On the 20th September 1932, Gandhiji entered on a fast unto death to save the Harijan Community from being cut off from the Hindu fold through the decree of the Communal Award by the British Prime Minister. On the eve of Gandhiji's entering upon this ordeal, Poet Tagore wired to him: "It is worth sacrificing precious life for the sake of India's unity and her social integrity . . . . I fervently hope that we will not callously allow such national tragedy to reach its extreme length. Our sorrowing hearts will follow your sublime penance with reverence and love." For six days the nation watched in anguish, while the leaders made feverish efforts to reach a solution. At last on the 24th September, the famous Poona Pact was arrived at under which separate electorates for the Harijans were done away with, and they were allotted seats in the Provincial Councils and at the Centre even on a more generous scale than what Ramsay Macdonald had done.

This agreement was cabled to the British Prime Minister on the 25th September, and was accepted immediately. The country breathed a sigh of relief : Gandhiji's life had been saved. The life of the Nation too had been reawakened. The fast and its conclusion marked a turning point in the political life of the country.



## CHAPTER VIII

### LULL AFTER STORM

The "epic fast" of Gandhiji brought about a transformation. The intense emotional stress of those six days suddenly released forces of social reform which, for a time, overwhelmed all else. No mere signing of an agreement between the Mahatma and Dr. Ambedkar, sitting across a conference table could have produced this upsurge. All over the country temples were thrown open to Harijans, the citadels of orthodoxy surrendered before the sweeping desire for reform. The venerable mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, who had hitherto lived in strict orthodoxy took food from the hands of a Harijan. In thousands of villages and towns all castes were allowed to use wells and tanks. By his penance Gandhiji had demolished the basis of untouchability once for all. Hereafter wherever it persisted, it could only do so with an awareness of its injustice.

Another consequence followed the fast: the emphasis was shifted from the political struggle and civil disobedience. Perhaps Gandhiji saw that a stale-mate had been reached in the struggle, and no forward movement was possible unless he could open up a new path. He created a new organisation named Harijan Sewak Sangh through which he could canalise the national effort. At a time when the people were almost falling into despondency, he gave them a new purpose vitally related to their progress.

One more beneficial result followed. Another effort was made to settle the Hindu-Muslim differences by calling a Unity Conference at Allahabad on 3rd November, with Pandit Malaviya and Maulana Shaukat Ali taking a leading part. All the leaders of the two communities were present and in the friendly mood then prevailing, agreement on many of the Muslim demands was arrived at. Among the points amicably settled were that "in the Central Legislature the Muslims of British India should get 32 per cent of representation and, secondly, that Sind should be constituted a Governor's province subject to certain safeguards for the Hindu minority". (Chintamani: *Indian politics since Mutiny*). It appeared as if all the important items in Jinnah's fourteen points had been conceded, and a settlement could now be effected. The prospect was none too pleasing to the British authorities. Sir Samuel Hoare promptly decided to out-bid the

Hindus and he announced in London that "His Majesty's Government had decided that the Muslim representation in the Central Legislature should be 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  per cent and that Sind should be a separate province with a subvention from the Central revenues and without any safeguards for the Hindus." (*Ibid*) The efforts of the Unity Conference were thus effectively thwarted by British machinations.

Side by side with these new developments, and with the gradual weakening of the civil disobedience, it was also becoming evident that the Indian Legislative Assembly in the absence of all Nationalist element, was putting through certain measures which would affect the fate of the country seriously. Towards the end of November it ratified the Ottawa Agreement by which a scheme of Imperial Preference in the matter of import trade was forced upon India. One of the consequences of this was a drain of gold from this country into England unparalleled in the financial history of the country. Another important legislation passed in November was the Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1932 by which all the iniquitous provisions of the Special Powers Ordinance of 1932 were permanently put on the Statute Book. A section of Congressman now began to feel that it was high time for the Congress to re-enter the legislature.

Thus with the dawn of the new year, 1933, politically minded persons began actively to think on new lines. The Independence Day was celebrated on 26th January with great zest in many towns and villages. Government carried out its usual plan of breaking up all meetings on the day. Kasturba Gandhi was among the persons arrested on that day. In Jabalpur Seth Govind Das was once again put under arrest while addressing a meeting. Some of the leaders who had completed their terms of imprisonment after the 1932 Movement had been released, and they gathered at Calcutta on April 11th for the annual session of the Congress.

But the Congress was still under a ban and the leaders who arrived there, including the President-Elect Pandit Malaviya, Dr. Alam, Shrimati Motilal Nehru, M. S. Aney, were arrested. Nevertheless the Congress managed to meet for a short while with Shrimati J. M. Sen Gupta as President. The subject then fresh in people's minds was the White Paper containing the proposals for Constitutional Reforms issued by the British Government earlier, on 17th March. The Calcutta Congress expressed its emphatic condemnation of the proposals. Soon after a large contingent of

police arrived at the meeting place and arrested Shrimati Sen Gupta and about 250 others.

The White Paper proposals were a travesty of reforms. They contained all the obnoxious features which had been repeatedly criticised at the Round Table Conference—safeguards, reservations and the privileges accorded to the Princes. The Central Provinces Assembly was allotted 112 seats of which 14 were reserved for Muslims and twenty out of the general seats were to be filled by Scheduled Castes. The Governor in the Provinces and the Governor-General in the Centre were furnished with adequate reserve powers to render all popular responsibility a mere shadow.

When these developments were exercising the public mind, on 8th May Gandhiji entered on a 21 days' fast intended as a purificatory penance. Considering the delicate state of his health Government decided to release him immediately. Finding himself thus suddenly outside the prison and feeling that he would not be morally entitled to lead the Civil Disobedience Movement in the circumstances, he suggested to the acting President of the Congress, Bapuji Aney, that the movement might be suspended for six weeks. This was followed by a meeting at Poona in July of those Congress leaders who were then out of prison. It was an unofficial meeting of the All-India Congress Committee. The question that engaged them was, whether the Civil Disobedience movement should be finally called off, or whether it should be restarted with full vigour. The predominant view appeared to be in favour of withdrawal and fighting the elections to the legislatures. Ultimately, Gandhiji was authorised to seek an interview with the Viceroy failing which "individual" satyagraha should be started. Accordingly on 15th July, Gandhiji asked Willingdon for an interview. It was refused. Thereupon, on 1st August, Gandhiji decided to start individual satyagraha along with a few members of the Ashram, but they were all arrested on that very day. While in jail, as a protest against the refusal of the usual facilities in prison, Gandhiji started a fast again on 16th August and was soon reduced to such a precarious state of health that on 23rd he was unconditionally released.

Gandhiji had almost a preternatural gift of sensing the mood of the nation. The wave of resistance and struggle had almost spent its force and before the people could once again gather up their spirits and gird up their loins for another supreme effort, a period of lull was inevitable. Such a lull had occurred about ten years ago when, after the fury of the first Non-Co-operation Movement, the national effort took the form of opposition from inside



the Councils. Gandhiji perceived the return of a similar phase now and therefore launched the constructive movement of Harijan uplift. Having been released unconditionally within a week after he was sent to jail under a year's sentence, he argued that he was under a moral obligation to consider himself as undergoing the sentence even though outside the prison. He, therefore, resolved that till August 1934 he would not take part in political struggle, but would devote himself to Harijan work and educational reform. He gave up his famous Sabarmati Ashram from where, on the historic day of the Dandi March, he had gone forth taking a vow never to return to the Ashram until Swaraj was won. And so, indeed, it happened. He now made Wardha his home and took up residence at a place called Maganwadi in the estate of Jamanlal Bajaj. It was about two years later that he moved further down the road to the village of Shegaon which under its new name Sevagram became famous as the nerve-centre of India's political life and a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world.

It would be profitable at this stage to trace the growth of this historic place which made Madhya Pradesh the headquarters of the national movement in the years that followed. The political importance of Wardha may be said to have begun from 1920 when Jamanlal Bajaj entered political life and was the Chairman of the Reception Committee during the Nagpur Congress. Since then he became one of the closest disciples of Gandhiji and placed in the service of the national cause all that he possessed. His donations to the various institutions in and around Wardha were estimated to be about Rs. 15 lakhs. The institutions at Wardha included an Ashram at Nalwadi which, under the supervision of Acharya Vinobha Bhave, ran a tannery, spinning and weaving centre, and village uplift centre. The Maganwadi Ashram is the centre of the All-India Village Industries Association where paper manufacture, honey-making, oil-pressing, carpentry and other cottage industries are fostered. Here also is the Mahila Ashram which runs a school. The most important part of this colony is, of course, Sewagram where Gandhiji, Kasturba and his trusted co-workers lived. Here too was situated the educational centre, the Talimi Sangh, run by Aryanayakam and his wife, Shrimati Ashadevi. Others who resided at Sevagram were Mira Ben and Dr. Sushila Nayyar. To this unpretentious place came statesmen, thinkers, political leaders, men of letters from all parts of India and from several countries of the world to meet the Sage of Sewagram. Here on crucial occasions the destiny of the nation was shaped. The mighty forces that swayed the country and shattered her bonds radiated from

here. Truly, in those stirring years Sewagram symbolised the mighty heart of India.

From this new abode in November 1933, Gandhiji commenced his ten months' long Harijan tour. He arrived first in Nagpur on 8th November where a mammoth crowd, the biggest that Nagpur had so far seen, gathered at Chitnis Park to listen to Gandhiji. It is said that this was the first meeting at Nagpur where loud-speakers were used, and they had to be brought from Bombay. After a week in Nagpur area he went to Berar on the 16th November and from there, in the third week of the month he moved to Chhindwara and Chhattisgarh. Throughout the tour in Mahakoshal he was accompanied by Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, and phenomenal crowds gathered at every place. It was an impressive spectacle, the long procession wending its way from village to village. Some scenes were very touching. At Bahrman Ghat on the Narmada, near Narsimhapur, he had to cross the river. The boatman approached Gandhiji with reverence, insisted on washing his feet and doing him homage before ferrying him across the Narmada. It was like a scene from the *Ramayan* re-enacted. He reached Jabalpur on 8th December where he halted for a few days, and attended an important meeting of the Congress Working Committee. During his tour of Madhya Pradesh he covered over 2,500 miles and collected Rs. 51,000 for the Harijan Fund. Thus began his all-India tour which lasted for nearly ten months, visiting almost every province in the country and collecting altogether about eight lakhs of rupees for Harijan uplift. The tour had an extraordinary effect upon the nation. The enthusiasm in every village and town he visited was immense. To a nation wearied out by a struggle forced upon it, all this had a stimulating effect.

It was while Gandhiji was touring in the South that the terrible news of the Bihar earthquake shocked the whole country on 16th January, 1934. Immediately he broke his tour and went to the afflicted province. Jawaharlal Nehru also, who had been released from jail earlier to enable him to be with his ailing mother, rushed to the devastated area. The destruction and ravages were unimaginable. For miles and miles there was nothing but rubble and ruin. About 20,000 persons were estimated to have been killed; over ten lakhs of homes had been wiped out. The calamity was something like what we might expect when a nuclear bomb bursts. For months Gandhiji toured the ravaged area, visiting relief camps, sending volunteers, organising the Bihar Central Relief Committee. Working under his guidance and spending

days and nights of ceaseless toil was Babu Rajendra Prasad who had been specially released from prison to meet this emergency. His sacrifice and service during this terrible catastrophe won for him a lasting place in the hearts of the whole nation. Jawaharlal Nehru stuck a volunteers' badge on his shirt and led batches of workers with pick-axe and shovel and worked at clearing the debris. Even tragedy has its compensations: it brought home the sense of indissoluble unity to the people. Jawaharlal Nehru was not, however, permitted to continue his service to the devastated Bihar. During a brief visit to Calcutta he made a couple of speeches the outspoken nature of which was not to Bengal Government's liking. He was arrested, tried and sentenced to two years imprisonment.

Meanwhile the leaders of the Congress were engaged in working out a positive course of action to end the state of suspended animation of the civil disobedience and evolve an alternative policy. After the Poona Conference of July, 1933 the view that in the existing situation the proper course would be to adopt a programme of council-entry began to receive increasing support from Congressmen. On 31st March, 1934 some leaders who were of this view met in Delhi with Dr. Ansari as president. They decided that Congressmen excepting those who took part in individual satyagraha, should organise the electorate with a view to fighting the forthcoming elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in November 1934. The issues on which Congress might fight the elections were, (a) repeal of the repressive laws, (b) rejection of the White Paper proposals, and (c) implementation of the National Demand, as stated by Gandhiji at the Round Table Conference.

To get Gandhiji's approval Dr. Ansari, Bhulabhai Desai and Dr. B. C. Roy went with these proposals to the village, Saharsa, in Bihar where Gandhiji was camping. Before the deputation reached him he had already prepared a statement regarding the future course of action, but he held it over so that he might discuss it with Dr. Ansari and his colleagues. Gandhiji agreed entirely with the proposals of the Delhi Conference. On 5th April he wrote to Dr. Ansari, "I have no hesitation in welcoming the revival of the Swaraj Party and the decision to take part in the forthcoming elections to the Assembly". In the course of the statement which he released to the Press he explained that for the preservation of the purity of Satyagraha as a method of struggle he had decided to reserve the right of offering civil disobedience to himself, to begin with. The mass civil disobedience movement should be suspended.

Thus a new direction was given to the freedom struggle once again. The All-India Congress Committee, which was the only Congress body which had not come under Government ban, met at Patna on 18th and 19th May and adopted the following resolution, stating the new policy:

"Inasmuch as there exists in the Congress a vast body of members who believe in the necessity of entry into legislatures as a step in the country's progress towards its goal, the All-India Congress Committee hereby appoints Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Dr. M. A. Ansari to form a Board with Dr. Ansari as President, called the Parliamentary Board consisting of not more than 25 Congressmen.

"The Board shall run and control elections of members to the legislature on behalf of the Congress and shall have power to raise, possess and administer funds for carrying its duties.

"The Board shall be subject to the control of the All-India Congress Committee and shall have power to frame its constitution and make rules and regulations from time to time for the management of its affairs. The Constitution as well as the rules and regulations shall be placed before the Working Committee for approval but shall be in force pending the approval or otherwise of the Working Committee.

"The Board shall select only such candidates as will be pledged to carry out in the legislatures the Congress policy as it will be determined from time to time".

The Working Committee met the next day and endorsed this resolution. Simultaneously Civil Disobedience was also suspended with effect from 20th May, 1934. As the Congress President, Sardar Patel, was in prison, Jamanlal Bajaj was nominated to act in his place, and in every province the various Congress Committees were once again set up. Once more purposeful activity filled the country. The Central Parliamentary Board was constituted with Dr. Ansari as President. Among its members from Madhya Pradesh were M. S. Aney and Seth Govind Das.

During the meeting of the A. I. C. C. at Patna the newly formed Socialist Party was particularly vocal. A day before the Patna meeting the All-India Socialist Conference had held its first meeting with Acharya Narendra Dev as President. The Socialists were not in favour of Council entry and were for the adoption of a programme based on socialistic ideology. They made it clear

that their organisation would function within the Congress and set up a drafting committee to draw up a constitution and programme. At the meeting of the A. I. C. C. on 19th May the Socialists moved an amendment to Gandhiji's motion on council entry but it was lost. It thus appeared that during this second phase of fighting from within the councils the mantle of the former "No-Changers" had fallen on the shoulders of the new Congress Socialist Party. Branches of the Socialist party were established in several provinces, the one in Bombay being the most active.

The annual session of the Congress held in Bombay on the 26th October came on the eve of the elections to the Central Assembly. But the subject that filled the minds of the delegates almost to the exclusion of all else, was the prospect of Gandhiji's retirement from the Congress. This topic had come up earlier at the meetings of the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board held at Wardha from the 8th September onwards. C. Rajagopalachari explained in a statement that the rumour of Gandhiji giving up leadership of the Congress was to be traced to the fact that he was thinking of introducing reforms in the Constitution of the Congress in order to make it more definitely purged of all forms of violence. Gandhiji himself confirmed this later in a statement issued a little before the Bombay Session of the Congress began. He had decided to stand aloof from Congress, partly in the interest of the Congress itself which should gain in strength by not leaning heavily on Gandhiji, and partly that he may himself be free in the pursuit of the programmes of reform and uplift which he had adopted as his way of life. The Bombay Congress is also significant for the changes it introduced in the Congress Constitution, stating the means for achieving its aims as "by truthful and non-violent means". It made the wearing of Khadi obligatory on all Congressmen. A third important decision taken at this Session was its endorsement of the Council entry programme. There was strong opposition from the Socialist wing, as was to be expected. In fact the Bombay Session was throughout made lively by the expression of sharp differences of views on many important issues. But the tact, urbanity and wisdom of the President, Babu Rajendra Prasad, steered the session to success. His own Presidential address provided an excellent survey of the recent events and a lucid statement of the future objectives.

The Bombay Congress was immediately followed by the electioneering campaign for the Central Assembly elections. One of the impediments in the way of Congress candidates was the disqualification that might affect them owing to their imprisonment

during the political struggle. But in view of the change in the policy of both Government and the Congress, it was understood that this disqualification would not apply in case of political prisoners. Surprisingly enough the Government of India, at the instigation of the Central Provinces Government did not allow this exemption in the case of D. P. Mishra who was prevented from contesting the election from Mahakoshal. Nevertheless, with a truly martyr's record of suffering in the past two years, the Congress came out successful in the elections on the crest of immense popularity. Everywhere the nominees of the Congress swept the polls. From Madhya Pradesh those who were elected on Congress ticket were Seth Govind Das, Ghanshyam Singh Gupta and M. V. Abhyankar. From Berar M. S. Aney was elected on the Nationalist Party ticket. But much to the sorrow of the country M. V. Abhyankar died soon after, in January 1935, and Madhya Pradesh and the country lost a brave fighter for freedom.

A conflict which arose in Jabalpur Municipality raised important constitutional issues and caught the attention of the whole country. It was a conflict between the rights of the Municipal Council and the powers of the bureaucracy. D. P. Mishra who had been elected President of the Municipality just before he was arrested in 1932, assumed office on his release from prison and soon after the question arose of the appointment of the Secretary of the Municipality. It so happened that the person chosen by the Municipal Council was a civil resister and a Congressman and, therefore, not to the liking of the bureaucracy. They sought to resist it and retain in the office of the Secretary a person who was more amenable to them. The issue became further complicated, because while the former Minister for Local Self-Government, M. Y. Shariff, had upheld the municipality's choice, the minister who succeeded him, Rao Bahadur K. S. Naidu, reversed the former decision. Apart from the impropriety of such a reversal of Government decision, the question which was of a more fundamental importance was whether the municipality had the right to appoint a civil resister as its Secretary. This battle was fought for many months on the constitutional level, the President insisting on the right of the municipality under the Act. It was fought to the bitter end until at last Government had to take recourse to the drastic remedy of suspending seven Sections of the Municipal Act, including one which stated that 'there shall be a President of the Municipality'. This amazing procedure was a confession of the utter illegality of the whole proceeding. The letter written by the President of the municipality to the

Government exposing the illegality of their action brought home the principles behind the fight. He said :

"This is no occasion to express regret on his removal from the presidentship and Government's action was a confession that whatever had been done by him was strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Act, from the operation of which they had exempted the Jabalpur Municipality. Since last week he had ceased to be recognised as President by the Government as, in spite of President's request, the Police assistance legally due to him under Section 222 of the Central Provinces Municipal Act was refused to him. The Local Self-Government under the Ministership of Rai Bahadur K. S. Naidu stood for a complete submission to the unlawful behests of the bureaucracy. The working of the Local Self-Government in Jabalpur served to give an idea of the painful fact that whatever be the form of local or provincial or Central Government, bureaucracy remained the master of the situation and its most obedient servants alone could retain office. Having especially singled him out for disqualification to the Assembly, the problem faced them of keeping him out of the municipality for fear of being returned again as Chairman. The elections due last September were postponed by the Minister on the ground that the electoral rolls were incorrectly prepared though certified as correct by the Deputy Commissioner. The electoral rolls prepared again under the supervision of the same Extra-Assistant Commissioner, now appointed as his successor, have been rotting in the Municipal Office without any sign of election. Unfortunately for the Government, the Municipal Act required at least one election prior to the supersession of a Municipal body. Thus there was no escape for the authorities from his continuing as President. Hence the executive fiat in the shape of a Government notification depriving the local municipality the right of electing its chairman. This was undoubtedly the Government's admission of confidence reposed in him by the local tax-payers. The Government ought to remember that although Mr. V. J. Patel and Pandit Motilal Nehru were dead, their spirits continued to inspire the younger generation which, regardless of its personal ambitions, was pledged to eternal fight."

Thus, the struggle was kept up on all possible fronts. In the newly elected Central Assembly the Congress Party was ably led by Bhulabhai Desai who brought back into the Assembly something of the brilliance, eloquence and courage which belonged to Motilal Nehru's leadership. The thrust and parry between him and M. A. Jinnah, who had now returned with the backing of the

Muslim League, lent to the proceedings of the Assembly a thrill which has hardly been kept up in later years.

The elections to the Central Assembly were only a prelude to the ushering in of the new Act and the General Elections that followed under the Act in 1936. Congress was now well set to accept the challenge of the constitutional changes. There was all the more need for the Congress to carry the battle into the council chambers because the acts of governmental oppression were increasing. Thousands of detenus were still in the jails of Bengal. "Frontier Gandhi" and Dr. Satyapal were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. It was against his background that the All-India Congress Committee met at Jabalpur on the 24th and 25th April 1935. It was an important session because of the widespread repression in the country that still prevailed. The ban on the Congress still continued in North-West Frontier Province. Numerous allied organisations, such as, the Khudai Khidmatgar, the Hindustan Sewa Dal and Youth League Organisations were also declared unlawful. All these subjects exercised the minds of the All-India Congress Committee and as a measure of relief to the numerous detenus it was resolved to start an all-India fund under the control of the Working Committee. The Working Committee meeting which met there at the same time made preparations for the next session of the Congress to be held at Lucknow. But before the Congress could meet, the country faced another calamity of the same kind, though not of the same magnitude, as what had happened in Bihar in the previous year. On 31st May 1935, Quetta was convulsed by a disastrous earthquake. So suspicious and panicky was Government that neither Gandhiji nor any of the leaders of the Congress was permitted to go to the Frontier Province to assist in the relief work. It only revealed the mentality of the Government even in the face of a widespread catastrophe of this nature.

Government was presumably preparing the ground for the inauguration of the Government of India Act which was finally passed by the British Parliament and received royal assent on 2nd July 1935. Under this Act the provinces would have the representatives of the people as ministers holding all the portfolios, and being responsible to the legislatures, though subject to overriding powers of the Governor. The Government of India was anxious that the "troublesome" Congress should not be allowed to get hold of these legislatures. But the efforts of Government proved unavailing. It was the will of the people that prevailed.





## CHAPTER IX

### FIRST CONGRESS MINISTRY

Half a century had gone by since the Congress was founded. During this period political India had rapidly grown from the nonage of meek petitions into the adolescence of defiant non-co-operation, thence into the maturity of responsible builders of freedom. It had evolved from a prim middle-class body into a broad-based mass organisation. It had thrown up leaders of stature and influence, some of whom were the equals of the greatest in the world in statesmanship, wisdom and courage. Above all, the Congress had been moulded and propelled by the greatest man of the age who represented in himself all that was best in India. In the wake of the Congress there had been a rich growth of other collateral organizations with specific purposes affecting various sections of interests. But they all signified the flowering of the national spirit and the birth of a purposive common endeavour.

To a nation of this stature was granted the Government of India Act of 1935 whose very basis had become by now an anachronism. Its tentative extension of responsibility in the provinces was rendered meaningless by the special powers and safeguards vested in the Governor. The Act was condemned by every section of political opinion. Even the Liberals found it disappointing. And yet a positive lead had to be given to the country. A sterile attitude of opposition would help no one. This was the issue that faced the Congress when it met at Lucknow in April 1936.

The President chosen unanimously for this session was Jawaharlal Nehru. He, if any, represented the mood of the country best at that moment. In September 1935, he had been released from Almora Jail to enable him to be at the bedside of his dying wife in Switzerland. Broken by years of sufferings she had passed away, and Jawaharlal Nehru returned to India in March 1936. It is hard to sell to what extent the sufferings in political struggle contributed to this tragedy. But putting domestic sorrow aside, Jawaharlal obeyed the call to guide the Congress at this crucial moment in India's freedom struggle. The main subject on which the Congress was called upon to give the lead was, of course, the general elections and the question of office acceptance. That the Congress should fight the elections if only to prove the support that it had in the country was a settled fact. The question whether Congress should take office was left for later decision in the light of the verdict of the people. It said: "The

Congress, in view of the uncertainties of the situation as it might develop, considered it inadvisable to commit itself to any decision at the stage and left it to be decided at the proper time by the All-India Congress Committee after consulting the Provincial Congress Committee." The Lucknow Congress drew up an agrarian programme which was later embodied in the Election Manifesto. The President took on his Working Committee three ardent Socialists—Narendra Deo, Jayaprakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan. About six years ago, at Lahore, Jawaharlal had declared himself a Socialist and a Republican. The Congress under his leadership was, therefore, bound to reflect this new spirit.

It was clear at Lucknow, and it was later impressed upon the Congress even more forcibly, that the Socialist view in the Congress was not shared by the majority. As in all dynamic bodies, growth implies the emergence of different views. But every one was conscious that these differences in regard to the pattern of social order could arise only after the major goal of independence had been attained. As Jawaharlal Nehru himself put it, "There can be no division in our ranks when the call of Independence came to all of us and tingled the blood in our veins. We may agree or disagree. We may even part company sometimes. But we shall march together to the tune of that call".

The Election Manifesto, on the basis of which the Congress decided to obtain the mandate of the people, emphasised this aspect of national independence as a vital means for the solution of the poverty and unemployment of the people. The policy of Congressmen was to resist Imperialism and to end all instruments of repression in the various Regulations, Ordinances and Act. In the sphere of industrial labour, of agrarian uplift and the removal of untouchability it laid down the objectives which Congress had always pursued.

On this basis the electioneering campaign was started in 1936, and it spread in an increasing crescendo all over the country. In Mahakhosal, the President of the Pradesh Congress Committee, Captain Lal Awadesh Pratap Singh was among the first to launch a vigorous campaign. Before tracing its progress in Madhya Pradesh, it is necessary to refer briefly to the administrative set-up in the province at that time. As stated earlier, the composition of the Legislative Council was such that no stable ministry had been possible. The life of the Council was extended from year to year after its normal term of three years was over. The result was that the members elected in November 1930 continued to sit till 1936—twice the normal length of a Council's life. There had been three

different ministries during this period, each supported precariously by a time-serving combination of groups. The last of these ministries consisting of B. G. Khaparde and K. S. Nayudu managed to remain in office for nearly three years from March 1934 onwards, and Dr. Raghavendra Rao continued as a member of the Executive Council ever since S. B. Tambe relinquished that office.

Soon after the Congress entered the field with its Manifesto and began an organised and intensive campaign among the people, a flutter was visible in the official dovecotes. The first disturbing sign they saw was the rush everywhere to get enrolled in the voters' list. The 1935 Act had enlarged the franchise so as to cover about a tenth of the total population. The Congress organisation in every village took steps to enlighten the people on this matter and get them to register themselves as voters. Bureaucracy was worried, and they bestirred themselves to see whether they could ensure at least a majority of following for one of their trusted men. They pinned their hopes on their Executive Councillor, Dr. Raghavendra Rao. On 15th October 1936, the Governor, Sir Hyde Gowan, wrote to all his Commissioners to keep a constant watch on the progress of the electioneering campaign and keep him posted every month with the developments in their Divisions, especially the party leanings of the prospective candidates and how far they might be trusted to support Dr. Rao.

At first the officials were inclined to hope that some differences in the Congress regarding the choice of the candidates might break up its solidarity. The Jabalpur Commissioner writes to the Governor on 1st November: "The Congress Parliamentary Board had an abortive meeting at Damoh on October 29th and extended the date of application for approval as candidates till yesterday. The Joint Central Provinces and Berar Congress Parliamentary Board was to meet at Nagpur today, and the leaders of the rival Jabalpur Congress groups were to be present, but the local candidates are not likely to be finally selected until about the 7th when the Mahakhosal Congress Preliminary Committee will probably meet at Jabalpur." He then examines the prospects of the different non-Congress candidates in their respective constituencies. Referring to one of them, he says, "He has a strong following of wrestlers and goondas. Many of the leading shroffs have pledged themselves to support him. . . . He may win in any case, but is more likely to do so if the Congress dissensions are not composed. . . . He would probably support Hon'ble Mr. Rao if elected." As regards another constituency, he further says, "I think no Congress candidate has much chance in this constituency",

and then says that of the two remaining candidates, "both will, it elected, support Hon'ble Mr. Rao". And so it went on. Everywhere the district officers anxiously scanned the electioneering horizon for any ray of hope. But as the weeks passed by, their hopes sank. On 14th January 1937, the Governor asked the Commissioners to give him a report by 1st February stating the developments which were of interest. Slender hope was still expressed that the support for Dr. Rao would be forthcoming in some at least of the constituencies. But the tune changed completely a month later. The Commissioner of Jabalpur informed the Governor on March 2nd, 1937, rather mournfully, "This election has resulted in Congress victories in every constituency in this district except the Jabalpur-Mandla Rural Constituency. . . . I underestimated the efficiency of the Congress organization and the strength of the vague underlying pro-Congress feeling in almost all parts of the districts." Some officers were anxious to explain away this unexpected result. They said votes were cast not in favour of the candidates but in the name of Gandhi. The Deputy Commissioner, Bilaspur, wrote: "Word, I am informed, went round the villages that Gandhiji wanted their votes. Villagers, therefore, flocked in large numbers and approached the green box (the Congress box) with great veneration and *salaamed* it before putting their voting paper into it." Sir Hyde Gowan, very disconsolately, noted on 10th February 1937, "The province will get whatever Government it deserves."

The election was, indeed, a phenomenal success for the Congress. In five provinces it won a clear majority, the highest percentage of seats being in Madras, Bihar and the Central Provinces. Out of the 112 seats in the Central Provinces Legislature, Congress captured 70 seats. Nearly 62 per cent of the voters polled in the elections. It was a convincing vindication of the principles for which Congress stood: a clear mandate from the people to implement the policy laid down in the manifesto. It was a situation which Government could not be blind to. All their policies hitherto had been discredited. The people had now sent up their real representatives whose duty it was to work out the destiny of the country. As a first step towards this task, a National Convention was called in Delhi on 17th March to which all the chosen representatives from every province were invited. Summarising the Convention, Sardar Patel who was the architect of the electoral victory of the Congress, issued an exhortation saying, "The first stage of our work is over, and we are now on the threshold of the next stage which will require all our energy and time, at least in the immediate future. If we show the same determination and

unity as we exhibited in a remarkable degree in winning the elections in our legislative programme, whatever that be, I have no doubt that we will once again confound our enemies and hasten the day of Swaraj."

At this Convention all the elected members of the legislatures took their oath of loyalty to National Independence and to the Indian People. This oath preceded the one which they would have to take in due course at the opening of the Legislative Assemblies, and, therefore, naturally proclaimed their primary loyalty which cannot be superseded by any subsequent oath. The National Demand was then reiterated, and the members pledged themselves to further its attainment. Thus, in a solemn and deliberate manner did the Congress enter upon the new task that faced the country.

Before tackling the major issues, they had first to decide the question of acceptance of office. The Congress had decided that unless the Governors of the provinces gave an assurance that they would act according to the advice of the ministers on all constitutional matters and would not use their discretionary powers, the Congress should not accept office. Accordingly in Madhya Pradesh, as in other provinces, the leader of the party when called by the Governor to form a Government, asked for this assurance. The Governor would not, or could not, give it. This led to the unconstitutional action on the part of the Governor of setting up a ministry which had no following in the province, consisting of Dr. Raghavendra Rao and three others. On 1st April, 1937, when the new Constitution came into force, this ministry took office—rather an ominous beginning for the new Act on a somewhat significant date too! In order to save this puppet Cabinet from immediate collapse, the Governor refrained from summoning a meeting of the Assembly.

This had an interesting sequel. All the seventy Congress members and some others, who were also of a similar view, met at the Vyankatesh Theatre at Nagpur on May 11th and 12th, and decided to consider it as the first meeting of the Provincial Assembly. They proceeded to elect a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker. Dr. Khare explained the object of the meeting, and thereafter Ghanashyam Singh Gupta was elected Speaker and Shrimati Anasuya Bai Kale, Deputy Speaker. Three resolutions were discussed and passed, one condemning the pseudo-Ministry appointed by the Governor, another calling upon the Governor to summon the Assembly and the third condemning the Government's

indifference towards the cultivators. The entire proceedings were intended to expose the unconstitutional action of the Governor.

Thus, an extraordinary situation was created throughout the country and the British Government and the Viceroy had to bestir themselves to resolve the deadlock. In the India Office it was Marquis of Zetland and R. A. Butler who were ruling. At Delhi Willingdon had at last left the country and Linlithgow succeeded as Viceroy. Clarifying statements were issued from London which, however, did not meet with India's approval. Legal objections were raised, but the Congress had equally eminent legal authorities to refute them. Unexpected support to the Congress view was received from the famous constitutional expert of England, Professor Berridaile Keith. Ultimately on June 21st the Viceroy made a statement which was meant to be conciliatory. He said the Governor would at all times be concerned to carry his ministers with him. When a Governor rejects any advice of the ministers they were at liberty to state publicly that they bear no responsibility in that matter and that it was contrary to their advice. Ordinarily such differences as might arise between the ministers and the Governor should be capable of resolution by mutual goodwill. The Governors were anxious not to provoke conflict with ministers, and were bound to exercise their authority on the advice of their ministers. The provision in the Act meant for extreme contingencies did not involve any assumption of a wish to see these contingencies turn into realities. In this manner, the Viceroy gave his interpretation of this controversial part of the Constitution.

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Wardha on 7th July to consider the situation in the light of this clarification. After prolonged discussion it was decided that though the explanation by the Viceroy did not entirely meet the wishes of the Congress, it was however clear that it would not be easy for the Governors to use their special powers. Therefore, it was resolved "that Congressmen be permitted to accept office where they may be invited thereto. But it desires to make it clear that office is to be accepted and utilised for the purpose of working, in accordance with the lines laid down in the Election Manifesto and to further in every possible way the Congress policy of combating the new Act on the one hand and of prosecuting the constructive programme on the other". Thus the matter was settled. The interim ministries in the six provinces where the Congress commanded a majority resigned; the leaders of the Congress party in these legislatures were invited by the respective Governors, and the interviews

having been regarded as satisfactory, the leaders agreed to form Governments and submitted to the Governors the names of their colleagues.

In Madhya Pradesh the Raghavendra Rao Ministry resigned on 14th July and on the same day Dr. N. B. Khare, who had been elected leader of the Congress Assembly Party, took office along with six other ministers. The first Congress Ministry consisting of the following members, thus assumed the Government of this State:

1. The Hon'ble Dr. N. B. Khare: Prime Minister.
2. The Hon'ble Pandit R. S. Shukla: Minister for Education.
3. The Hon'ble Pandit D. P. Mishra: Minister for Local Self-Government.
4. The Hon'ble Mr. R. M. Deshmukh, Bar-at-Law: Minister for Public Works.
5. The Hon'ble Mr. M. Y. Shareef, Bar-at-Law; Minister for Law.
6. The Hon'ble Mr. D. K. Mehta: Minister for Finance.
7. The Hon'ble Mr. P. B. Gole: Minister for Revenue.

One of the first acts of the first Congress Government was to release the few remaining political prisoners, cancel the bonds asked for from others and to refund the securities already forfeited or deposited by the Press. The Ministry had to face, almost at the very beginning of its term of office, a communal clash of some magnitude at Jabalpur in October 1938. But prompt measures were taken; some of the ministers rushed to the spot immediately, and the disturbances were put down. Among the beneficent measures that the Government were able to initiate were the liberalisation of the forest rights, the opening of schools for Adivasis, and the preference given in all Government departments to articles manufactured within the province. The Government also carried out a thorough survey of the economic resources of the province. The tax on the small holders was reduced by 12½ per cent, and debt conciliation boards were set up.

A far-reaching reform of Local Self-Government introduced by the first Congress Ministry had a lasting significance not only in this province but elsewhere. In the evolution of this reform, the Cabinet also came almost to a clash with the Governor. At first the Governor took objection even to the printing of the scheme in



the State Government Press, but on the minister insisting he finally yielded. Later the scheme came up for discussion before the Cabinet. The Governor had seen to it that the bureaucracy should put up an adverse note on the scheme declaring it impracticable. But they had calculated without the minister, who had, in the meanwhile, obtained the views of Professor Berridaile Keith who gave the scheme not merely his support but enthusiastic praise. Faced with this authoritative pronouncement the Governor was taken aback and in the end had to bow to the proposal. However, only a part of the scheme in respect of the municipalities could be put through by the Government during this period of office. But it is significant that the provision contained in the Municipalities Act for the election of the municipal president by the vote of the whole town was later adopted by U. P. Government. The remaining features of the scheme including the reform of Gram Panchayat and Janapada had to wait for about ten years till the people's representatives once again took office.

By far the most conspicuous measure of reform which caught all-India attention was the Vidya Mandir Scheme of education initiated by Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, the Education Minister. It was a scheme of basic education by means of which the colossal illiteracy in the province might be progressively eliminated. The Vidya Mandirs were self-financing institutions which imparted to the students not only reading, writing and arithmetic, but also a trade or craft which would give them an occupation. A comprehensive curriculum was drawn up which included weaving, spinning and agriculture. Each school had a piece of land attached to it, and both the land and the school building were to be donated by the people. The produce of the land and the proceeds from the articles made by the pupils were expected to fetch the required income for running the school. Some agitation was started by Muslims in certain parts of the province against this scheme on the plea that it went against Islamic ideals. One of their grievances was that it was called a 'Mandir'. Nevertheless, the scheme grew in popularity and by 1939 there were 93 Vidya Mandirs functioning in the province with nearly 2,500 pupils in them.

When the Congress found itself in power in six provinces, an important question which soon emerged and demanded attention was how to ensure an overall control and a uniform co-ordination of policies in the Congress-administered provinces. Should the ministers in the provinces be answerable to the Central Parliamentary Board or to their leader in the Cabinet? Ordinarily there

should be nothing irreconcilable between the two, but when there was a divergence the larger interests of the Congress organisation seemed to require a central control. It so happened that this important issue was put to the test in Madhya Pradesh. From about the beginning of January 1938, differences began to grow in the ministry between the Mahakhosal Ministers and the Chief Minister. The former felt that their leader was playing into the hands of the Governor and the bureaucracy. The Chief Minister, Dr. Khare, on his side felt that his Mahakhosal colleagues were actuated by regional feelings. Matters came to such a pass that the ministers from Mahakhosal decided to hand over their resignations to the Parliamentary Board to which they felt they were ultimately answerable. This led Sardar Patel to attempt to bring about an understanding between the two sections. He along with Maulana Azad and Jammalal Bajaj visited Pachmarhi in May 1938 and it appeared as if he had succeeded in effecting a settlement. But it turned out otherwise. Soon after the Cabinet returned to Nagpur in July, Dr. Khare tendered his resignation and the resignations of two of his colleagues to the Governor. The ministers from Mahakhosal refused to do likewise without consulting the Parliamentary Board. Thereupon the Governor dismissed them from office and called upon Dr. Khare to form another ministry which he promptly did on the 21st July.

All these startling actions of the Chief Minister, not only without the knowledge of the Working Committee but contrary to their clear directions, raised a major issue. Is the supremacy of the Working Committee and the Parliamentary Board to prevail? The Congress had to settle this issue. The need for discipline within the Congress and the larger interests of the nation demanded that there should be a central control on such constitutional issues. It would be disastrous during this crucial phase of the national struggle to permit fissiparous tendencies in the provinces. Such was the view upheld at the meeting of the Working Committee at Wardha from the 21st to 23rd July. Dr. Khare and his reconstituted cabinet had to resign. The Congress legislative party elected a new leader in Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla and a cabinet formed under his leadership took office on the 29th July. It consisted of Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla as the Chief Minister, and D. P. Mishra, D. K. Mehta, S. V. Gokhale and C. J. Bharuka as Ministers. This episode is historically interesting only in so far as it establishes the supremacy of the discipline and solidarity of the Congress organisation which was so important during a vital stage in the struggle for freedom.

In the early months of the Congress regime in Madhya Pradesh bureaucracy met with a not very pleasing experience during their tours, which was a testimony to the far-reaching influence of the Congress among the masses. The Sub-Divisional Officer, Bilaspur complained as early as in August 1937, that the villagers were refusing to render him those customary free services which had been a part of the touring officer's normal expectations. No one would give him even a quarter seer of milk. He went on to say, "I have good reasons to believe that touring officers of all the departments have been experiencing various kinds of difficulties, and I am sure every one will have his own tale to tell. These difficulties appear to be due to deliberate misunderstanding caused by irresponsible workers of the Congress." Again, in another context, he said: "This state of affairs is due to the Congress propaganda that was done before and after the election. The local leaders keep on occasionally visiting the locality and reminding the public that the Government servants are now their servants". The Governor, in alarm, wrote "Anything but reassuring. Sooner or later, I suppose, those who are responsible for the present state of affairs will realise the idiocy of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face." The Chief Secretary took up this matter with the Chief Minister. This was in January 1938. The Chief Minister noted, "I have spoken to Bilaspur M.L.As. and the matter, I think, will be set right". A few weeks later the Deputy Commissioner, Bilaspur wrote to the Commissioner, Chhattisgarh Division, of the complete change in the situation. "Personally, in my tour in the Janjgir tahsil this month, I received almost cordial welcome every where. No difficulties were experienced either by me or by my camp followers in obtaining supplies or labour". No wonder bureaucracy came to entertain a wholesome respect for the pervasive influence of the Congress

A feature that marked the annual sessions of the Congress after Lucknow, 1936 is noteworthy. Hitherto this important gathering of political India used to take place in large cities. But with the Faizpur session in December 1936, Congress went to the countryside. Those who journeyed to Faizpur had to look up the Bradshaw to see where it was. It was symbolic of the rural emphasis that came into the Congress programme. The kisans, the poverty-stricken villagers, the day-labourers living on the verge of starvation: these were the masses of India for whom Swaraj should bring the long-needed relief in terms of employment, food, better conditions of life. Jawaharlal Nehru was called upon to preside, for the second consecutive year, and give to Faizpur Congress the lead in agrarian reform. In the next year also at

Haripura in February 1938, under the leadership of Subhas Bose, the Congress pre-occupation was with the masses. This was reflected in the setting up of the National Planning Committee under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru,—India's first determined attempt to solve her problems in a planned way. The work of the Congress ministries in the six provinces which by that time had completed about seven months, was also tested by this standard. In the political sphere, Subhas Bose said: "My term of office will be devoted to resist the unwanted federal scheme with all its undemocratic anti-national features".

Haripura was followed by Tripuri, again an outlying rural spot about seven miles from Jabalpur, on the bank of the Narmada. It was about nineteen years ago that the last session of the Congress was held in Madhya Pradesh—nineteen years of unprecedented political storm and stress, crowded with events sufficient to fill a century. The atmosphere at the Tripuri session was tense and anxious. It had been preceded by a presidential contest in which though Subhas Bose had won, it did not secure for him the solid and lasting support of the Congress organisation. The session was overcast by the shadow of Gandhiji's fast unto death at Rajkot on the issue of the Thakore's having gone back on his agreement with Sardar Patel. Besides, in the far distant horizon in the West the war-clouds were gathering over Central Europe. Strident fascism was threatening the very existence of human freedom.

While in the world of thought and spirit these dark forebodings cast a gloom, in the material and natural setting the Tripuri Congress was a most picturesque session. The place was one of Nature's beauty spots, and man had done his best to deck it with all the ornament of art. To symbolise the interest of the Congress in the Kisan, a colossal statue of "The Awakened Peasant" carrying a plough on his shoulders stood on one side of this rostrum facing the audience. The Presidential procession was led by a majestic chariot drawn by fifty-two elephants. But the President himself was laid-up with high fever, and a portrait had to be installed in his place in the chariot. To all the other dark shadows was added the prolonged illness of Subhas Bose who had to be carried in a stretcher to the meetings of the Subjects Committee and the A. I. C. C. In the absence of the President Maulana Azad presided over the opening session, and Seth Govind Das read the Welcome Address. To add to the tension of the session, it was clear that there was a sharp division of opinion in the Congress on fundamental issues, and the majority was not with the President. The Bengal Congress Committee wanted an ultimatum with a time-limit to be given to Britain,

after which a mass civil disobedience should be started. This could not be endorsed by the Congress. Tripuri thus, inevitably, led to the breaking away of Subhas Bose and his group from the Congress who later formed the Forward Bloc.

Events followed in quick succession after Tripuri and within five months after, the war-clouds burst over the world. Before tracing the events that led to it and the consequences that flowed from it, a brief reference is necessary to the rapid deterioration in the Hindu-Muslim relations during this period, because it had far-reaching and permanent repercussions in the years to come. The sweeping victory of the Congress in the 1937 elections followed by the formation of Congress ministries in six provinces was the signal for the Muslim League to raise the cry of Hindu domination all over the country. The cue was given by M. A. Jinnah at the Lucknow session of the League in October 1937. He said bitterly, "The present leadership of the Congress, especially during the last ten years, has been responsible for alienating the Mussalmans of India more and more by pursuing a policy, which is exclusively Hindu, and since they have formed governments in six provinces where they are in a majority, they have by their words, deeds and programme shown that the Mussalmans cannot expect any justice or fair play at their hands. On the very threshold of what little power and responsibility is given, the majority community have clearly shown their hands that Hindustan is for Hindus".

It has already been mentioned earlier that the Vidya Mandir scheme produced in Madhya Pradesh a loud agitation by Muslims. The Working Committee of the Muslim League meeting at Karachi directed Liaquat Ali Khan to investigate the complaints made by Muslims. He visited some of the important Muslim centres in Madhya Pradesh in December 1938 and held discussions with the Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, regarding the scope and purpose of Vidya Mandirs. Apparently he was satisfied that the scheme was not intended to injure Muslim interests in any manner and the Muslim League Satyagraha against the Vidya Mandirs came to an end.

However, the Muslim Press in the State continued to be provocative and communal in tone. One of the worst offenders was a paper called *Jaddo Jehad* published in Nagpur. Some of the writings in this paper were so highly objectionable that the Chief Secretary referred them to the Commissioner, Nagpur Division, D. J. N. Lee, suggesting to him that action should be taken against the editor. Surprisingly enough the Commissioner, Nagpur, considered the articles not sufficiently objectionable. Some of the choice

sentences in the articles were: "Is it not a fact that the Muslims were beaten in their own houses and their women taken away"; and further on "people are openly asked in the Muslim mohollas to enter the houses of the Muslims, bring out their wives, sisters and daughters and outrage their modesty on the roads". These were some of the milder sentences in the articles and yet Mr. Lee pontifically remarked: "It seems to me that the general tenor of the articles is allowable public criticism the repression of which does not seem to me to be in the public interest". It was clear that some of the British officers were openly interested in adding fuel to the fire of communal tension.

The next step in the agitation was to raise the cry that atrocities were being committed on Muslims in Congress provinces. The Muslim League met in April, 1938 at Calcutta and appointed a committee under the Raja of Pirpur to enquire into the "hardships, ill-treatment and injustice that is meted out to Mussalmans in the various Congress provinces". By the end of the year the notorious Pirpur report was published giving fantastic accounts of the atrocities on Muslims, the purpose however being to make out a case sufficiently strong to discredit the Congress ministries. Professor R. Coupland who was certainly not an apologist for the Congress but had personal knowledge of the Congress administration of the provinces, came to the conclusion that "the case against the Congress Governments as deliberately pursuing an anti-Muslim policy was certainly not proved". Babu Rajendra Prasad who was Congress President at that time, informed Jinnah that the charges contained in the report had been investigated and found baseless, and further added that the Congress was prepared to get the allegations enquired into by a person of the stature of Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice of the Federal Court of India. But Jinnah did not choose to accept the offer. Sardar Patel remarked that the Congress ministers had invited the Governors to intervene in any of their actions in regard to the minorities if they were considered not correct, and that the Governors never had cause to intervene.

It was obvious that the League was not interested in testing the truth of any of their allegations. They were rather interested in working up a fanatical hatred of the Congress, charging the Congress as a Hindu body wanting to establish, in the words of Jinnah, "an authoritative totalitarian and fascist Hindu Raj". Such was the atmosphere in the country when Hitler's war burst upon the world.



## CHAPTER X

### CONGRESS QUILTS OFFICE

The policy of appeasement followed by the democracies of Europe—England and France—had led to the triumph of Facism in Italy, Germany and Spain. Before the sweeping hordes of Hitler and Mussolini, liberty and the rights of men were wiped out from the reater part of Europe. At the same time, in the East, Japan who had been an apt pupil in the ways of Imperialism had marched into China, rousing in that country a heroic and widespread resistance. With the spoliation of Czechoslovakia the Chamberlain policy of surrender to violence and aggression reached its most deplorable depths. Unabashed gangsterism reigned supreme. Then came the crash in the beginning of September, 1939, when the massed armies of Hitler marched, unprovoked, across the borders of Poland. There was an Anglo-Polish Treaty which bound England to go to the aid of Poland in the event of aggression. So, on the morning of 3rd September, 1939, an anxious world heard the grim news, which had been expected for some time, that Germany and the Allies were at war.

Before the actual clash came, the Chamberlain Government had begun to deal with India in the typical imperialistic way. In August, without even so much as informing the representatives of the people in the Legislature, the Government had dispatched Indian armies to Egypt, Aden and Singapore for the defence of the Empire. The British Parliament enacted emergency legislation curtailing even the little freedom that India possessed, and arming the Viceroy with powers to take action in the Provinces without consulting the Provincial Governments. Finally, under orders from Whitehall, and without caring to consult the people of India, the Viceroy in Delhi declared India a belligerent country on the side of the Allies.

No doubt, India had long ago expressed herself thoroughly opposed to the policy and practice of Fascism. At a time when England and France were conniving at the tyrannies of France and Hitler, when the European democracies were standing as complacent onlookers of the rape of Abyssinia, the Congress had expressed its abhorrence of Fascist aggression. From 1937 onwards, the Congress had adopted resolutions expressing its sympathy for



democratic Spain, protesting against the annexation of Czechoslovakia and expressing its disapproval of the British policy which had connived at these violations. Therefore, there could be no doubt about India's attitude towards Germany in September, 1939. But the Congress insisted on the inalienable right of India to decide for herself the policy she should pursue. The people would resist any attempt by an alien Government to impose its decision on India, and exploit Indian resources for the purpose of war. When in August Government moved Indian troops without consulting the people, and passed emergency legislation over the heads of the Central Assembly, the Congress Working Committee, meeting at Wardha, called upon the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly to refrain from attending the next session of the Assembly. The Congress Provincial Governments were told that they should not assist the war preparations of the British Government in any way. Thus, the unimaginative and perfunctory attitude of the British at this crucial moment rendered the undoubted goodwill of India in the Allied cause infructuous.

Linlithgow attempted to make belated reparation by inviting Gandhiji to Simla, for personal talks. The day after the war broke out, Gandhiji left Delhi for Simla and discussed with the Viceroy the nature of the conflict and India's part in it. He made it clear to the Viceroy that he could not speak on behalf of the Congress, but strictly from the humanitarian point of view he expressed his sympathy with the cause of the Allies. "My whole heart is with the Poles in the unequal struggle in which they are engaged for the sake of their freedom."

The Congress Working Committee met on 8th September at Wardha. In view of the gravity of the situation they invited some other important leaders also to attend the meeting. Among them was M. A. Jinnah, but he declined the invitation "owing to previous commitments". For five days the Committee discussed the situation in all its aspects. Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been on a visit to China, returned to India and reached Wardha on the 10th. At the end of the fifth day the Working Committee issued a clear and impressive statement which voiced, as completely as it was possible, the opinion of the whole nation at this historic moment. It said:

"The Congress has repeatedly declared its entire disapproval of the ideology and practice of Fascism and Nazism and their glorification of war and violence and the suppression of the human spirit. It has condemned the aggression in which they have

repeatedly indulged and the violation of the recognised standards of civilised behaviour. The Working Committee must, therefore, unhesitatingly condemn the latest aggression of the Nazi Germany against Poland and sympathise with those who resist it." The statement went on to emphasise that the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people. No outside authority can impose this decision on them. India cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her. Therefore, the Working Committee called on the British Government to state its war aims. "If the war is to defend the *status quo* of imperialists possessions then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it." If these were the aim, it naturally followed that Great Britain must establish full democracy in India. The Working Committee defined in clear terms what was demanded. "The Indian people must have the right of self-determination by framing their own constitution through a Constituent Assembly without external interference and must guide their own policy. A free India will gladly associate itself with other free nations for mutual defence against aggression and for economic co-operation." The Committee emphasised the urgency of the situation in view of the swift pace of events. Any declaration that Government may make about the War aims must be given effect to immediately to the largest possible extent, "for only this will convince the people that the declaration is meant to be honoured".

The whole statement was a masterly and cogent document which while stating the point of view of India forcibly, kept the path open for negotiation. But it struck no responsive chord in the hearts of the British. On 26th September, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, made a statement in which he hardly did justice to the Congress resolution. He described it as ill-timed and calculated to cause embarrassment to England in its life and death struggle. Meanwhile, the Viceroy carried out a marathon series of interviews with leaders of all possible sections of Indian opinion. He began with Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru, and then called in turn fifty-two persons, exponents of groups, big and small, selected for their diversity of views. Whether it was so intended or not, the effect was to bring into undue prominence the views of those who could not deliver the goods because they had none to deliver. At the end of all these talks the Viceroy made a declaration from Delhi on 17th October, 1939, in which he laid stress on this very aspect: "The marked differences of outlook,

markedly different demands and markedly different solutions for the problems that lie before us." If one searches minutely enough for differences alone, one can always find as many varieties as one may wish for. But one important fact which neither the Viceroy nor the Secretary of State cared to remember was that only a couple of years previously the Congress had won an overwhelmingly sweeping success at the polls, that the Congress ran the Government in six provinces and, in the all-India picture of the last General Elections, the Congress had secured the highest number of votes in the country taken as a whole. To equate the views of such an organisation with those of small groups and sections, which had little support in the electorate, was to ignore the realities of India's political situation and put deliberately a premium on minority opinion.

The Viceroy's declaration, in these circumstances, was bound to be wholly disappointing. He repeated the hoary phrase about "the progressive attainment of Dominion Status". As regards war aims, he referred to the numerous speeches of Chamberlain, and as for India's future destiny he could only quote the statement of former Viceroys. He mentioned ominously that "in the conversations I have had, representatives of the minorities have urged most strongly on me the necessity of a clear assurance that full weight would be given to their views and to their interests in any modifications that may be contemplated." The Secretary of State made a similar statement in the British Parliament and referred the Members to the White Paper on the Viceroy's declaration.

Thus at a time when the great nations of the world were engaged in a desperate war for survival, when the forces of History had placed India on the side of England in this conflict, when the issues involved in the war established an identity of purpose between India and England, the persons who found themselves charged with the conduct of the war and the governance of the British Empire proved to be deplorably lacking in vision and statesmanship. Their tiresome repetition of out-worn phrases of twenty years ago, at a time when world situation was changing every day, disillusioned and angered India. The entire map of Europe was undergoing an alarming transformation, but Britain still harped on the Declaration of 1919. At Wardha, once again, the Congress Working Committee met on 22nd and 23rd October. They declared the Viceroy's statement wholly unsatisfactory and calculated to rouse resentment among all people in India. "In the circumstances, the Committee cannot possibly give any support to Great

Britain, for it would amount to an endorsement of the Imperialist policy which Congress has always sought to end. As a first step in this direction the Committee called upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations."

During all these rapid changes the Muslim League waited upon the course that Congress might adopt before declaring its own intentions. Obviously the League wanted to keep its hands free to play their own anti-national game. It wanted the Congress to make the first move before deciding what it should do. That was why Jinnah had refused to go to Wardha when invited. The day after the Congress Working Committee adopted the resolution calling on the Congress Ministries to resign, the League Working Committee met and congratulated the Government on repudiating the claim of the Congress to represent all India and expressed satisfaction at the general tenor of the Viceroy's declaration of 17th October. Jinnah was given complete powers to seek clarification on certain points in the declaration from the Viceroy, and if he was satisfied "the League empowered him to give an assurance of support and co-operation on behalf of the Muslims of India to the British Government for the purpose of the prosecution of the war".

More interviews with the Viceroy followed. Gandhiji, Babu Rajendra Prasad and Jinnah were called on November 1st. The expansion of the Viceroy's Council and the setting-up of a body in the Centre representing all shades of opinion as a Consultative Group were discussed. But neither in the talks with the Viceroy nor in the discussions with Jinnah was any common ground for co-operation visible. On the contrary, the repeated emphasis laid on the demands of the minorities, and on the need to consult "several communities, parties and interests in India and with the Indian Princes", revealed that even in this emergency the British had not got out of their habit of "divide and rule". The Congress naturally resented this repetition of the old game, and exposed it in the letter that the Congress President, Babu Rajendra Prasad, wrote to the Viceroy on 3rd November: "This crisis is entirely political and is not related to the communal issue in India. It raises vital questions in regard to the war aims of the British Government and the position of India in relation to them." The letter went on to say, "It has pained us to find the communal question being dragged in this connection. It has clouded the main issue. It has been repeatedly said on behalf of the Congress that it is our earnest desire to settle all points of communal controversy by

agreement and we propose to continue the efforts to this end. But I would point out that this question does not in any respect come in the way of a declaration of Indian freedom."

Any attempt at agreement when the fundamentals of the question are not admitted by the parties, was doomed to failure. Consequently, the Viceroy announced in a broadcast talk to the nation the failure of the negotiations. He regretted that in many of the provinces Government would have to use the emergency provisions following on the resignation of the Congress Ministries. Referring to these provisions, this Scottish nobleman quoted an Arabic proverb: "My own strong feeling in regard to their use I cannot better convey than by a paraphrase of the quotation that appears in Arabic characters on the Gateway at Fatehpur Sikri. The quotation says, "Life is a bridge—a bridge that you shall pass over. You shall not build your house upon it." The quotation was probably meant to serve as a bridge to bring the Government and the League closer together. The War did, indeed, find the League closer to the Viceroy and the British Government than ever before. The Viceroy had told them "you need have no fear that the weight which your community's position in India necessarily gives your views, will be underrated". Jinnah, willing to be wooed, protested further that "Your Excellency is unnecessarily over-anxious about the interest of other communities". He did not want too much importance to be given to Sikhs, Hindu Mahasabha, Scheduled Castes and such others. The Secretary of State made further protestations of fidelity: "I cannot believe that any Government or Parliament in this country would attempt to impose and force upon 80 million Muslim subjects of His Majesty in India a form of constitution under which they would not live peacefully and contentedly." On going through the statements and correspondence on the negotiations between the Muslim League and the Government during this period, one cannot but observe a striking resemblance in them to the spirit and tone of the Minto-Muslim talks in 1906. There was the same solicitude and eagerness to placate Muslim sentiment as a counterpoise to the Congress.

With the failure of the negotiations between the Viceroy and the Congress, the resignations of the Congress Ministries became inevitable. In the Central Provinces Legislative Council a heated debate on the War took place before the Ministry actually resigned. On 4th November, for the first time in its history, the Legislative Council met in the morning to debate the resolution on the War moved by the Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla.

Speaking on the resolution he referred to the way India had been dragged into the war without a single Indian having been so much as spoken to in the matter. "Nothing in recent times", he said, "had brought home the inferior status assigned to us in the British Commonwealth as this act of the British Government". He referred to the familiar and empty words which had been repeated by British statesmen, and added, "now that we have proved ourselves equal to the task of self-government, another bogey is being trotted out—the bogey of minorities". He described this as a Nazi technique, the only difference being that while Nazis used communal differences for conquering a free nation, the British were using it to perpetuate their conquest of India. He referred to the Indian National Congress as the surest safeguard of India against Fascism, "a second Himalaya which protects India against the inroads of foreign Nazi and Bolshevik hordes", and warned Britain that if they embarked on repression, it would certainly provide the German propagandists with plenty of atrocity stories.

The Muslim League in the Council, true to its form, repeated the familiar allegations against the Congress Government. Its leader, Rauf Shah, complained of the persecution of Muslims and pointed to the just manner in which Muslim Egypt was treating the non-Muslim minorities. This argument brought forth an effective reply later in the debate from D. P. Mishra, who said that the Muslim League certainly had no right to hold up Egypt as an example, because the Congress was closer to Egypt as proved by the visit of an Egyptian delegation to the Tripuri session of the Congress earlier in the year. "They left India even without so much as looking at the Muslim League." The opposition to the resolution came also from the European and Scheduled Caste members. Thakur Chhedilal moved an amendment expressing full confidence in the Ministry while asking them to resign. The debate which had lasted four days and had been tense on occasions was wound up by D. P. Mishra, who clarified the position taken by the Congress in relation to India's demand and the claim of minorities. He quoted from a statement made by Gandhiji to the effect that: "The Congress has made a handsome and sporting offer. Let the Constituent Assembly by elected representatives frame the constitution for the future Government of India subject to safeguards for protecting the rights of minorities to their satisfaction." There could be no more reasonable and just offer for the settlement of India's future, and yet neither the British Government nor the Muslim League had chosen to accept it. If the situation in India has worsened the

responsibility for it lay squarely on the shoulders of the British Government. Quoting a passage from Jawaharlal Nehru he pointed out that "even during the last week it was not any difference between Mr. Jinnah and us that came in the way, but fundamental difference between the British Government and us. Let there be no mistake about this. No one stands in the way of unequivocal declaration of the war aims and of India's freedom by the British Government except themselves. Till such satisfactory declaration is made, other issues do not arise and we cannot associate ourselves in any way with British policy. To drag the communal question is to befog people's mind and divert them into wrong channels".

With this comprehensive and conclusive exposure of Britain's ulterior intentions towards India and a final statement of India's stand, the Ministry resigned and the Parliamentary form of Government, for the time being, came to an end in this province. It is interesting to observe that in the concluding sentence of the speech by D. P. Mishra he had expressed the hope: "that it be given to us that when I stand up next time on the floor of this Assembly it should be either in a free and independent India or, at any rate, in an India which has been assured of independence on an appointed date". Succeeding events fulfilled this hope six years later.

Soon after the adjournment of the Legislative Council, the Central Provinces Ministry sent their resignations to the Governor on 8th November. He requested them to stay on in their posts till he could make alternative arrangements, and ultimately accepted the resignation on 10th November. It was clear that on the part of the Governor, Sir Francis Wylie, there was genuine regret at the departure of the Ministry. He continued to keep up his contact with some of the members of his cabinet after they had left office. Pandit R. S. Shukla and D. P. Mishra, while serving their term in Seoni Jail used to receive letters from him, and even when he later went away to U. P. as Governor, the relationship did not wholly break. Another feature of the first Congress Ministry which was brought out at the time they quit office was the mutual respect and confidence that had sprung up between the Ministry and the permanent services, particularly the Indian element in them, in the State. The Services had found in the Ministers a spirit of understanding. When the Ministers resigned office the senior servicemen met in a mood of sincere regret to bid them farewell, though there was an expectation in all of them

that they would soon return and resume responsibility of Government. But that was not to be for another six years.

Political commentators both in India and abroad were divided in their opinion about the wisdom of Congress quitting office. Some of them felt that it was neither opportune nor politically prudent. For instance, H. N. Brailsford observes, "Had these ministries existed two years later they might have taken positive collective action in the constitutional crisis. Together the premiers of the provinces might have spoken for India with more authority." May be political expediency might have dictated such a course. If Congress had intended to treat Britain's adversity as India's opportunity it might have stayed on in office hoping to exploit the tides of war as they came. But to Congress the question was a moral issue. They could not be a party to a war in which the principles at stake were never defined, in the prosecution of which their own views were never consulted. The only honourable course in the circumstances was to dissociate themselves from the war and quit office.

The Congress exit had a curious sequel in Muslim politics. Although efforts were being made at the time to hold Congress-League talks on the communal issue, Jinnah decided to give a call to Muslims to observe the last Friday of Ramzaan, December 22nd, as "a Day of deliverance and thanks-giving to mark the feeling of relief that the Congress Governments had ceased to function". The intention obviously was to provoke the Congress, to add fuel to communal bitterness and keep alive the Muslim agitation that was born out of the Pirpur Reports. It would not suit Jinnah's purpose to make communal concord possible. Furthermore, the intention appeared to be to undermine the Congress prestige and break the impact of the resignations on Indian and World opinion. The Congress should not be permitted to quit office in a blaze of approbation.

The efforts of Jinnah notwithstanding, the simultaneous resignation of the Congress ministries in six provinces produced a tremendous effect upon the world. To the Congress, however, it was a grave moment. They knew that they were launching on stormy waters. A struggle was inevitably ahead. But Congress did not desire to precipitate it, unless the British forced their hands. The Working Committee met at Wardha from the 18th to 22nd December and resolved that in view of the political crisis and need to prepare the country for the struggle that may be



forced upon us, the ensuing Independence Day on the 26th January 1940, should be observed throughout the country with due solemnity. It should be not only a declaration of the national will to freedom but a preparation and a pledge to disciplined action. For this purpose the Committee prescribed a pledge which every Congressman was required to take on the occasion. It said:

"We believe that it is an inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and enjoy the fruit of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any Government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence.

"We recognise that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. India has gained strength and self-reliance and marched a long way to Swaraj following peaceful and legitimate methods, and it is by adhering to these methods that our country will attain Independence.

"We pledge ourselves anew to the Independence of India and solemnly resolve to carry out non-violently the struggle for freedom till Purna Swaraj is attained.

"We believe that non-violent action in general and preparation for non-violent direct action in particular, require successful working of the constructive programme of Khadi, communal harmony and removal of untouchability. We shall seek every opportunity of spreading good-will among fellow-men without distinction of caste or creed. We shall endeavour to raise from ignorance and poverty those who have been and to advance in every way the interests of those who are considered to be backward and suppressed. We know that though we are out to destroy the imperialistic system we have no quarrel with Englishmen, whether officials or non-officials. We know that distinction between the caste Hindus and Harijans must be abolished and Hindus have to forget these distinctions in their daily conduct. Such distinctions are a bar to non-violent conduct. Though our religious faith may

be different, in our mutual relations we will act as children of Mother India, bound by common nationality and common political and economic interest.

"Charkha and Khadi are an integral part of our constructive programme, for the resuscitation of the seven hundred thousand villages of India and for the removal of the grinding poverty of the masses. We shall, therefore, spin regularly, use for our personal requirements nothing but Khadi, and so far as possible, products of village handicrafts only and endeavour to make others do likewise.

"We pledge ourselves to a disciplined observance of Congress principles and policies and to keep in readiness to respond to the call of the Congress, whenever it may come, for carrying on the struggle for the independence of India."

Thus, it was not in a light-hearted mood or in a spirit of opportunism that Congress embarked on the incalculable perils of an unmatched struggle. It was rather with a high purpose and a sense of mission. The appeal issued by the Congress President on the eve of the Independence Day of 1940 is an eloquent expression of this lofty mood. "Let us ask ourselves if we have been true to our high ideals, noble purpose and the pure means which we have kept before ourselves to achieve our aim. Let each one ask himself, have I taken away every tinge of communalism from my life? Have I been true to the masses? The world is in the throes of a destructive war that threatens the very foundations of civilization. If the war is carried on by all parties with tainted motives we may despair of any humane and equitable world order. If by our non-violent means we can put an end to our internal strife and attain freedom, we will have proved to a doubting world that it can yet be saved without the aid of death-dealing instruments of war." Such was the high and humanitarian purpose, the healing mission, for which the Congress prepared itself in the coming months.

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## CHAPTER XI

### STRUGGLE RESUMED

The awareness that events were irresistably moving towards a struggle was present in the minds of every one who gathered at the village of Ramgarh in Bihar for the fifty-third session of the Congress with Maulana Azad as President. There had been a "will-o'-the-wisp" of a possible solution in some remarks made by the Viceroy during his visit to Nagpur and Bombay in January 1940. This had been followed by an interview between Gandhiji and the Viceroy in February. But, like many others before, this interview also left the matters where they were and no common ground could be reached. Following the customary practice of doling out meticulously equal treatment to the Congress and the League, the Viceroy had called Jinnah also to an interview the day after the talk with Gandhiji. There was a significant article by Jinnah published in *Time and Tide* in London on 13th February which could be taken as the straw in the wind. He argued that western democracy was wholly unsuited to India and demanded that a constitution should be evolved which recognised the existence of two nations in India both of whom should share the governance of the country.

All signs of the times thus pointed to an impending conflict. But, at Ramgarh, Gandhiji was firm that the time was not ripe for mass civil disobedience. The resolution of the Congress, therefore, left the final decision to Gandhiji. It said, "The Congress withdrew the Ministries from the Provinces where the Congress had a majority in order to dissociate India from the war and to enforce Congress determination to free India from foreign domination. This preliminary step must naturally be followed by Civil Disobedience, to which the Congress will unhesitatingly resort as soon as the Congress organization is considered fit enough for the purpose. The Congress desires to draw the attention of Congressmen to Gandhiji's declaration that he alone can undertake the responsibility of declaring Civil Disobedience." There was impatient enthusiasm among the people gathered there whose spirits were not damped by the pouring rain in which the proceedings were conducted. They waited only for the leader to give the signal.

Meanwhile, at about the same time, the Muslim League met at Lahore with M. A. Jinnah as president, and pronounced the novel idea, since made familiar by the course of events, that the Hindu-Muslim question was not an inter-communal, but an international one, and that the Hindus and Muslims were two distinct nations. Thus came into existence the demand for Pakistan, the demand that, in the words of the League resolution, "geographically contiguous units be demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial adjustments as may be necessary so that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority should be grouped to constitute independent states." Thus the seeds of dissension planted thirty years before by separate electorates and the political segregation of Hindus and Muslims, now brought forth their final fruits.

The course of the war, in the meanwhile, was proving to be calamitous for the Allies. Hitler overran Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium. France collapsed in a matter of days. At Dunkirk the retreat of the Expeditionary Force proved a costly success. This was Britain's darkest hour. The Working Committee took note of the worsening situation and in July 1940 at Poona for the first time passed a resolution which had the appearance of parting company with Gandhiji. It said: "While the Working Committee hold that the Congress must continue to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in their struggle for Independence, the Committee cannot ignore the present imperfections and failings in this respect of the human elements that they have to deal with. . . . The Committee have deliberated over the problem that has arisen and have come to the conclusion that they are unable to go the full length with Gandhiji. But they recognise that he should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way and, therefore, absolve him from responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress has to pursue under the conditions at present prevailing in India and the world." The Working Committee followed this up with an offer to Great Britain that if Britain made an unequivocal declaration of the complete independence of India as its object, and as an immediate step in giving effect to it set up a provisional National Government at the Centre commanding the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature, and also Responsible Governments in the provinces, the Congress would throw its full weight in the effort for the effective organization of the defence of the country.

It was a far-reaching and generous offer made by an organization wedded to non-violence, whose leaders had all served long

terms in prison in defence of that principle. It involved even the sacrificing of the leadership of Gandhiji for a time. And yet the British response to it was pitifully unimaginative. The Viceroy came out with what was later known as the 'August offer' which meant nothing more than the enlargement of the Executive Council so as to include a few Indians. He also proposed to set up a War Advisory Council which would include representatives of the Indian States. The declaration of the Viceroy contained, as was to be expected, the tell-tale emphasis on the minorities: "It goes without saying that His Majesty's Government could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government."

The nationalist Indian saw in this offer only one patent fact, that Britain was determined to give to the "large and powerful elements"—which meant the Muslim League, the Princes and the Scheduled Castes Federation—a virtual veto on all questions of reform. This was certainly not likely to put any of these groups into a reasonable frame of mind for an agreement. It was on the contrary an invitation to them to stick to their utmost demand, because Britain would not be a party to any coercion of these groups. But Britain which was so hyper-sensitive about coercing the minorities had no qualms of conscience in coercing the majority. Armed with the veto the minorities felt no inducement to adopt a reasonable attitude and a perpetual bar was placed on any progress.

The August offer was rejected by the Congress unequivocally. It exposed the absurdity of the charge of coercion, and said "the demand for a settlement of the constitution through a Constituent Assembly of duly elected representatives has been misrepresented as coercion and the issue of minorities has been made into an insuperable barrier to India's progress." It appeared clear that the British Government was not serious about a lasting solution. During the past few months Government had been picking up and arresting hundreds of Congressmen on all sorts of specious charges under the Defence of India Act. Satyagraha had now become inevitable; and Gandhiji was again invited to give the lead to the nation. He, however, made it clear that the Satyagraha was to be practised in a manner not to embarrass Britain in her struggle for survival. The Satyagrahi never takes advantage of the opponent's difficulties. He said, "Today there is no question of

mass civil disobedience. There may be individual civil disobedience."

The principle of the individual civil disobedience was simple. Since Britain had refused to state her war aims or to extend the principle of self-determination to India, we have the right to say what we feel about the war, provided we stick to the policy of non-violence. It is a form of emphatic moral protest while, at the same time, avoiding a mass upheaval. To persons who have been accustomed to the revolutionary methods in the West, it might appear strange that a political movement should be conducted with so much consideration for the difficulties under which the rulers suffered, and carried out in such a way as to make it easy for the authorities to round up the individual civil resisters. Such a movement may, indeed, seem strange, but it was Gandhiji's way. It was his way of combining revolution with moral values.

The Satyagraha was conducted smoothly everywhere. Each Provincial Congress Committee which had converted itself into Satyagraha Committee, made up lists of individual satyagrahis and sent them to Gandhiji for his approval. After his acceptance of the list, the individual satyagrahi, usually by himself though sometimes accompanied by a small procession, walked up to a chosen spot in a village or a town and delivered a speech asking the people not to support Britain's war effort. As soon as he has pronounced these words the waiting policemen caught hold of him and took him away either on foot or in a vehicle kept in readiness. The movement was inaugurated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, who was chosen by Gandhiji as the first individual satyagrahi. On 17th October, he addressed a meeting at Pauniar near Wardha asking people not to support the war effort. Though Government refrained from arresting him on the spot, they prohibited the publication of all news relating to the satyagraha, and later he was arrested and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Then followed an almost never ending stream of individual satyagrahis all over the country. Jawaharlal Nehru, was arrested on 31st October, the moment he alighted from the train at Allahabad on his return from Wardha. The circle of individual civil resistance steadily expanded bringing within it all the front rank leaders, the provincial leaders of the Congress, members of Congress committees and the rank and the file Congressman. In the Central Provinces, in November 1941, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, D. P. Mishra, S. V. Gokhale, Seth Govind Das, Brijlal Biyani and C. J. Bharuṇka had all been arrested. Within about six months after

the campaign had been started, nearly twenty-five to thirty thousand men and women were inside the jails, among whom were all the former Chief Ministers of the Congress majority provinces, 29 former ministers and 290 members of the provincial legislatures.

It might be contended that the form of civil disobedience adopted during this period was mild compared to what preceded in 1930 and what was to follow. If it was mild it was deliberately so. Too generous and decent to strike while England was in distress, the Congress had chosen a feeble but symbolic form of protest. Gandhiji issued detailed instructions to the Satyagrahis about their conduct when asserting their freedom of speech. The result was that instead of appreciating the generous motives of the Congress, Amery and his tribe ridiculed the whole protest. In the course of a debate in the House of Commons, Amery made a particularly provocative speech which drew from Gandhiji a forceful statement "every line and every word of which breathed indignation--of a type somewhat unusual with the Mahatma", as Srinivasa Sastri observed. Gandhiji pointed out the great restraint and moderation which had marked all the steps taken by the Congress. "With Mr. Amery's state of mind, I suppose it is too much to expect him to have the elementary grace to acknowledge the studied moderation of the Congress in its desire not to embarrass the British Government while it is fighting for its very existence. Not having that grace, he turns the Congress moderation against it and claims that the Congress civil disobedience has fallen flat."

This is as near an explanation as we have had from Gandhiji why during this critical period he had decided in favour of individual civil disobedience as against a mass movement. The nation was still not without hope that the British statesmen might realise the need to meet India's national demand. The Congress did not desire to make an already critical situation more dangerous for England. Instead of appreciating this considerate and sportsman-like attitude, the Secretary of State for India twitted the Congress about its feeble protest, and flung in the country's face the communal issue. By their own deliberate encouragement of minority intransigence, Amery was in fact attempting to mortgage India's future to certain intractable leaders of the minority.

The Muslim League met at Madras in the second week of April 1941 to reaffirm in strong terms the demand for Pakistan. Not content with having sown the dragon's teeth of Muslim



League communalism, Jinnah proceeded to disrupt Hindu society also by suggesting the creation of "Dravidastan". He asked, "Three per cent of high caste Brahmins by skilful manoeuvring have secured a majority rule. Is this democracy?" It was a dangerous game that Jinnah was playing at this time. Dragooning the Muslims who dared deviate from the League, chiding the British for not being grateful enough to him and the League, baiting the Congress as a Hindu organization, and at the same time goading the non-Brahmins to follow his own example—Jinnah was doing all he could to break up and Balkanize India.

About this time there occurred a curious tussle between the Viceroy and Jinnah which serves to show the peculiar alliance that existed between them. In July 1941, the British Government decided to expand the Viceroy's Council by including eight Indian Members. At the same time they proposed to set up a National Defence Council consisting of thirty members from various sections and interests in the country. The Congress, of course, would not have anything to do with this, and most of the leaders of the Congress were in jails. But others there were, willing to be pieces of ornaments in the Executive Council who could be depended upon to serve the interests of the Viceroy and British Government. Truly the British Government was anxious to win some prominent Muslims to their side. But perhaps by intent or on purpose the Viceroy sent his invitations direct to the Muslim Chief Ministers of Bengal, Punjab and Assam and to important members of the Muslim League Council like Sir Sultan Ahmad and Sir Feroz Khan Noon. Jinnah felt annoyed; he had been by-passed. Then started a controversy between Linlithgow and Jinnah which has been described by a wag as a 'lovers' quarrel'. Jinnah asked the Muslim League premiers of Bengal, Punjab and Assam to resign from the National Defence Council. Two of them complied, but the third, A. K. Fazlul Haq, protested for some time before he reluctantly gave in. For some unknown reason Jinnah did not attempt to enforce his authority on Sir Akbar Hydari and Sir Feroz Khan Noon.

But the theatricality of all this was apparent to the British Government, as they continued to evince the same interest in placating the Muslim League. A revealing incident took place in the Central Provinces. A serious communal trouble occurred at Amravati in November 1941. In that connection Nawab Siddique Ali Khan was prosecuted under Section 153-A of the Penal Code and under the Defence of India Act. The Working Committee of

the Muslim League which was meeting at Nagpur protested against the prosecution, the Nawab being one of the leaders of the League in the province. Jinnah wrote to the Provincial Government about it. The Provincial Government consulted the Centre. The Chief Secretary noted on 22nd November "It seems to me unnecessary to prosecute Mr. Siddique Ali Khan both under the Defence of India Rules and under Section 153-A, especially as the Government of India suggest a light sentence." A little later the Governor was of the view that after a light sentence was delivered, the sentence should be suspended under Section 401 of the Criminal Procedure Code, and an announcement to that effect should be made by the trying magistrate. Thus the Chief Secretary informed Government of India on 8th January 1942, that the Nawab "was released on 3rd January and was informed that it was the intention of Government to remit the suspended sentence at the expiry of six months, provided that he commits no new offence during that period. The release has been well received by both Siddique Ali Khan and the Muslims of Nagpur". Truly the Central Provinces Government could not be accused of not being solicitous and considerate to the Muslim League !

But we are anticipating. The progressive deterioration in the relation between India and the British Government during the months of 1941 was accelerated by the interpretation which the British Prime Minister Churchill gave to the terms of the Atlantic Charter. The famous Charter announced to the world on 14th August 1941 contained eight points guaranteeing to all nations, among other things, the right to choose the form of Government under which they will live and the restoration of sovereign rights and self-government to those who have been deprived of them. The first impact of the Charter on world opinion gave to subject nations all the world over, buoyancy and hope. But if India had entertained any expectations from the Charter, they were effectively killed by the clarification which Churchill gave to it in the House of Commons. He said: "The Joint Declaration does not modify in any way the various statements of policy which have been made from time to time about development of constitutional government in India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire". He went on further to emphasise that the future of India was to be decided according to the terms of the various statements by British Government made in the past from 1919 onwards. The object of the Atlantic Charter was quite different from "the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in regions whose people owe allegiance to the British Crown". Much of the discontent which grew in

India from September 1941, onwards could be traced to this provocative declaration by Churchill. Even the moderate and loyalist sections of the country found themselves filled with anxiety and uncertainty as a result of this statement. In the Central Legislative Assembly M. S. Aney who was then a member of the Executive Council, confessed his inability to offer any interpretation of the Atlantic Charter. He could only "interpret it in the light of dictionaries and grammar and such other things."

The war situation, in the meantime, grew worse through the months of 1941. The position in Europe was desperate. Churchill, who had taken over the command of the War Cabinet and the conduct of the war, sought to put the best face on the situation. And then, suddenly, without warning, on December 7th, Japan bombed Pearl Harbour. Within twenty-four hours Shanghai and Siam were occupied and the Japanese army landed in British Malaya. The naval strength of Britain was crippled by the sinking of the two battleships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*. The war had come closer to the shores of India. It was paradoxical to keep the accredited leaders of India in jails when dire peril stood on the door-steps. On 3rd December, Government of India issued a Press Communique saying, "The Government of India, confident in the determination of all responsible opinion in India to support the war effort until victory is secured, have reached the conclusion that the civil disobedience prisoners whose offences have been formal or symbolic in character can be set free. Effect will be given to this course as soon as possible. Before the end of the year the Government of India hope that throughout India practically all such persons will have been set free". On the next day most of the leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad were set free. Coming out of the prison on 5th December, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that "he had only emerged from the narrow confines of the jail into the larger prison that is India. The time will come surely when we break through and demolish all the prison walls that encompass our bodies and minds, and function freely as a free nation. But that time is not yet". Before attaining that liberation the nation had to pass through yet another ordeal of fire.

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## CHAPTER XII

### TROUBLED WATERS

If the German advance in Europe in 1939 had been swift, the onrush of the Japanese in South-East Asia in December 1941 was like a typhoon. The British bastion in the East, Singapore, fell in a few hours. Rangoon was bombed. Upper Burma was invaded. The Japanese army was poised on the Bay of Bengal and across the Chindwin to attack India. An unprecedented tension gripped the country. The war which had so far been but a dim and distant shadow was now almost at our doors. And then, shaking the people's confidence from one end of the country to the other, the first Japanese bombs hit the eastern coast of India near Cocanada. More bombs fell at Vizagapatam, Trincomalee and Colombo. There was a stampede of people fleeing from coastal areas into the interior. Across the fields and open ground trenches were dug and sand-bags were piled up. In every town and every ward of the town, air-raid shelters were put up and people were trained in air-raid exercises. The sirens shrilled now and then to enable the people to get used to it. In the most vulnerable parts of India efforts were made even to organise a resistance movement in case the enemy occupied them.

In the midst of this anxiety and panic began the endless trek of the destitute refugees from Malaya and Burma into India. From about the last week of December 1941, through the early months of 1942, tens of thousands of Indians crossed the Irawady and started on the weary road to India, the end of which many were not fated to see. But here too, in the face of this tragedy, the callousness and cruelty of the British officials towards the refugees was inhuman. There was a "White road" and a "Black road", the one easy and smooth, the other no road at all. The few facilities of transport, refreshment and protection were for the privileged ruling class: the Indians compelled to take to the Black road were left to the tender mercies of the snipers, brigands and the perils of the forests. For many months the bitterness and anger of these days filled the hearts of the people.

The Government appeared to be either helpless or unfeeling. They looked on while panic seized the masses. Something had to be done to sustain the morale of the people. Soon after the national leaders were released from jails, the Congress called a meeting of the Working Committee at Bardoli on 23rd December.

In the face of the threat of Japanese invasion which had reached the borders of India, the divergence once again appeared in the Congress between the ideological faith in non-violence and the expediency of armed defence in certain situations. Gandhiji, therefore, wrote to the Congress President requesting to be relieved of Congress leadership. While recognising the correctness of the Congress following a path of conditional help in the war effort subject to India's independence, Gandhiji was convinced that only non-violence could save India and the world. He, therefore, decided to release the Congress from his leadership so that it might pursue the path chosen by the Working Committee.

Apart from this, the Working Committee gave a directive to all Congressmen to help the people to overcome nervousness and excitement. It was necessary for people to stay at their posts and render all possible service and prevent the mischief that unsocial elements might create. The minds of the people sorely needed reassurance. What would happen to them if the Japanese army were to land on our coasts? The manner in which the Government had conducted itself in handling the refugee and the evacuation problems gave the people little assurance of safety in such an event. A new element had entered the country in the large number of American troops which might also prove to be another disturbing factor. It was already beginning to appear that there was not much warmth of feeling between the British bureaucracy in India and the rather unconventional American.

Such were the troubled waters on which the carefully prepared Cripps offer was launched in March 1942. One could imagine the seriousness of the emergency from the fact that on 11th March the diehard Prime Minister of Britain admitted in the House of Commons that "the crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made us wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader". This was three days after the fall of Rangoon. Churchill also announced the choice of Sir Stafford Cripps for a mission to India. It certainly was a happy choice, not only because of the eminent personal qualities of Cripps himself but because he had an intimate knowledge of India and of the minds of the leaders of India including Gandhiji. Besides, he had been the British Ambassador in Moscow when Hitler invaded Russia.

The fault was not with the messenger but with the message. Cripps reached New Delhi on 22nd March 1942. He immediately sent a telegram to Gandhiji at Sewagram requesting him to meet

him. "I did not wish to go", said Gandhiji, "but I went because I thought it would do some good". In the afternoon of March 27th, Gandhiji spent a little over two hours with Cripps at Delhi. He quickly glanced through the plan which Cripps had brought with him, and, we are told, Gandhiji looked up and said to Cripps, "Why did you come if this is what you have to offer? If this is your entire proposal to India, I would advise you to take the next plane home". "I will consider that," Cripps is said to have replied (Louis Fischer: *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 386). The flaw was in the Plan. It was in two parts, the long-term plan and the immediate one. While the long-term portion was drawn with care and elaborate detail, the immediate set-up was perfunctory. The Congress in its very first Resolution adopted after the outbreak of the war in 1939 had clearly said, "The real test of any declaration is its application to the present". It is on that test that the Plan failed. As regards the immediate war-time arrangement, the Plan said, 'His Majesty's Government must inevitably bear the responsibility for and retain the control and direction of the defence of India as part of the total war effort. . . . His Majesty's Government desire and invite the immediate and effective participation of the leaders of the principal sections of the Indian people in the councils of their country'. The leaders pronounced this vague and restricted. The Congress President, Maulana Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru and C. Rajagopalachari discussed this aspect threadbare with a view to seeing whether this could be so enlarged as to become in practice, if not in principle, a responsible Government, the Viceroy remaining a constitutional head. At one stage it appeared that Cripps, on his own responsibility, had conceded almost what the leaders wanted. But he was soon pulled up. "The Governor-General was irritated with the whole business", and Cripps was ordered to withdraw the unauthorised offer and return to England.

As for the long-term plan, it was to take effect as soon after the termination of the war as possible when a Constitution-making body would be set up to frame a constitution. One-third of this body would be appointed by the Princes of India. The rest would be elected on the communal basis. It would draw up a Constitution for an Indian Union, from which any of the acceding units would be free to withdraw and become an independent State. Thus, all the six hundred odd States would join in the Constitution-making and were free later to walk out of the Constitution which they had made. The entire procedure was a positive encouragement to unreasonableness, reactionary tactics and disunity. The whole Plan was not merely "a post-dated cheque on a

tottering bank", but the cheque itself was irregular and not likely to be honoured. The whole document was rigid and unalterable and we were asked to accept it or reject it as a whole. "Behind it lay the continuous, century-old policy of the British Government creating division in India and encouraging every factor that came in the way of national growth and freedom" (Nehru : *Discory of India*, p. 554).

The Working Committee of the Congress gave the whole plan the most careful thought. They conceded that "they could not think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will." But, then, the first principle should be to create the conditions that would facilitate the development of a common national life. "The proposal now made on the part of the British War Cabinet encourages, and will lead to attempts at separation at the very inception of a union and thus create friction just when the utmost co-operation and goodwill are most needed". Leaving the future plan aside, the Working Committee went on to say that "in today's grave crisis it is the present that counts, and even proposals for the future are important in so far as they affect the present". The position taken up by the Congress throughout the negotiations was that in view of the imminent danger to the country, they would be prepared not to raise the question about the future and concern themselves with the formation of a National Government which could devote itself fully to the prosecution of the war. The Congress President, Maulana Azad, made this clear in a letter he wrote to Sir Stafford Cripps: "We would point out to you that the suggestions we have put forward are not ours only but may be considered to be the unanimous demand of the Indian people. On these matters there is no difference of opinion among various groups and parties, and the difference is as between the Indian people as a whole and the British Government. Such differences as exist in India relate to constitutional changes in the future. We are agreeable to the postponement of this issue so that the largest possible measure of unity might be achieved in the present crisis for the defence of India. It would be a tragedy that even when there is this unanimity of opinion in India, the British Government should prevent a free National Government from functioning and from serving the cause of India as well as the larger causes for which millions are suffering and dying today".

But it became soon clear that these discussions led nowhere. What was needed to capture the imagination of the people and

induce the maximum war effort, to make everyone in India feel that it was a national duty to fight the invader, was a substantial approach to a National Government in the present. But on this issue the British Government was unbending. Maulana Azad, the Congress President, brought this out emphatically in the final letter he wrote to Cripps. He said: "We are not interested in the Congress as such gaining power, but we are interested in the Indian people as a whole having freedom and power . . . ."

We are convinced that if the British Government did not pursue a policy of encouraging disruption, all of us, to whatever party or group we belonged, would be able to come together and find a common line of action. But, unhappily, even in this grave hour of peril, the British Government is unable to give up its wrecking policy. We are driven to the conclusion that it attaches more importance to holding on to its rule in India, as long as it can, and promoting discord and disruption here with that end in view, than to an effective defence of India against the aggression and invasion that overhang us. To us, and to all Indians, the dominant consideration is the defence and safety of India, and it is by that test that we judge."

The talks broke down, and Cripps left India on 12th April. All the major parties in India had rejected the Cripps offer. There was a belief in official circles that Jinnah had kept ready in his pocket two resolutions, one of acceptance and the other of rejection. As usual he waited for others to express their decision. When he learnt that the Congress had rejected the offer, he tore up one of the resolutions, and published the other, rejecting the scheme because of its rigidity.

For some time after Cripp's departure there was a pointless controversy about Gandhiji's Pacificism being responsible for the rejection of the Cripps proposals. This is of course, absurd, because after the two hours' talk on 27th March Gandhiji never again had anything to do with the negotiations. The crux really was the irreconcilable nature of India's aspirations and Churchill's policy of "We mean to hold our own". It was a few months later, on 10th November 1942, when India was in the storm of the "Quit India" movement, that Churchill came out with his well-known dictum: "I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside at the liquidation of the British Empire." Behind the failure of the Cripps negotiations was this pompous and pontifical spirit. It was on this imperialist rock that Cripp's proposals wrecked.



The failure of the Cripps mission brought in its train frustration and an encraving feeling of despair. The panic of a Japanese invasion persisted. There was a rumour that a Japanese fleet was making for the port of Madras, and this was followed by precipitate evacuation of the city. Thousands of river-boats were destroyed in Calcutta so as to prevent the Japanese making use of them. Even in Madhya Pradesh whose geographical situation might be expected to give it comparative security, the panic was widespread, accentuated by the elaborate air-raid precautions. Politically the result of the breakdown of Cripps talks was a stiffening of attitude in India as well as in England. And yet the issue was so simple. We wanted to defend our country; we have such an immense man-power that even as China was able to resist the invader, we would have opposed the Japanese by sheer strength of numbers if nothing else. The tragedy of the situation was that all this reserve power was rendered idle and bottled up, because the Indian army was but a wing of the British army, and they would have nothing to do with the Indian people. Unless we were free, we could not effectively defend ourselves. India's feelings were put succinctly by Nehru who declared at a public meeting, "I would fight Japan sword in hand; but I can only do so as a free man".

Soon after the return of Cripps and the withdrawal of his offer, the Working Committee of the Congress met at Allahabad and adopted a resolution which re-stated India's stand in the light of recent events. They declared the British Government's proposals a clear proof that even in the hour of danger the British Government was functioning as an imperialist Government which refused to part with power in India. The resolution then went on to say, "The present crisis as well as the experience of the negotiations with Sir Stafford Cripps, makes it impossible for the Congress to consider any schemes or proposals which retain even in a partial measure British control and authority in India. Not only the interests of India but also Britain's safety, and world peace and freedom demand that Britain must abandon her hold on India."

Before this resolution in the form given above came to be adopted, the Working Committee had discussed at great length and with some heat, an earlier draft of it sent by Gandhiji. During the raid of Swaraj Bhavan carried out by the police, they came across the notes of that discussion which were purely private and with some heat, an earlier draft of it sent by Gandhiji. ment published these notes in the notorious Tottenham Report on "The Congress Responsibility for the 1942 Disturbances". We see

from these notes that Gandhiji's draft contained a clear call to the British to withdraw from India, but it said, at the same time, that India would defend herself in the event of the Japanese or any aggression attacking India. It was not so much the wording of Gandhiji's draft but rather the notes of the discussions on it that Tottenham intended to exploit. But no one who knew the attitude of Gandhiji could find anything wrong in it. On the contrary, the notes only reveal the freedom and frankness with which the members of the Working Committee expressed their views: quite different from the false idea that Gandhiji domineered over the Congress.

Meanwhile the failure of a negotiated independence of India, and the rapid advance of Japan in Singapore, Malaya and Burma with their ravaged cities and burnt-out homes, gave Gandhiji the idea that if the British had withdrawn from those countries well before the Japanese invasion, these destructions might not have taken place. We are told this idea was first expressed by him in a letter to Horace Alexander on 22nd April 1942. The letter said: "My firm opinion is that the British should leave India now in an orderly manner and not run the risk that they did in Singapore, Malaya and Burma. That act would mean courage of a high order, confession of human limitations and right doing by India". From this moment he turned this idea over and over in his mind, and the more he did so the more it appeared a logical and natural demand for India to make. Some one asked him, "are you not inviting the Japanese to invade India by asking the British to withdraw?" "His prompt reply was, "I am not. I feel convinced that the British presence is the incentive for the Japanese attack."

In an article in *Harijan* on May 24, 1942, he gives another reason why the British should withdraw. Their presence it was that kept alive the communal dispute and as long as they were there, all efforts to bring about agreement were bound to fail. "It is from the frustration of every effort made to bring about unity, by me among many others, that has arisen the logical step that not until British power is wholly withdrawn from India can there be any real unity." An American correspondent asked him, "Suppose the British withdrew and India is free. Will the troops of America and the allies be permitted to operate from India?" Gandhiji unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative. He amplified it later, and said, "They may need to remain in India for preventing Japanese occupation. That prevention is a common cause between them and us. It may be necessary for the sake also of

China. Therefore, I would tolerate their presence in India, not in any sense as rulers, but as allies of free India".

Thus the conviction steadily grew in the mind of the nation's leader that in the interest of the country, for the security of Britain and the allies, for the vindication of the principle of non-violence, Britain must immediately and in an orderly fashion withdraw from India: "Quit India". Thus was born the famous slogan, the war cry in the battle for India's liberation, which echoed from one end of the country to the other, and ultimately led us to freedom's goal.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### FIGHT TO FINISH

For about three months from May to August, 1942, India was moving irresistably to a final clash. We have seen the mind of Gandhiji revolving within itself, thinking aloud in the *Harijan*, resolving upon the shape of this last effort to liberate India. He took the decision openly, and Government knew in advance the intention of the Congress. There was nothing secretive about Gandhiji's methods and Government took full advantage of it. After the Allahabad meeting of the Working Committee, they next assembled at Wardha on 14th July to re-state the Congress position. It was made amply clear that the demand for the withdrawal of the British was not made with a view to embarrassing the Allies in their war effort. The Congress was willing that the armed forces of the Allies may be stationed in the country to ward off the Japanese invasion and to help China. The transfer of real power to the people's representatives was demanded so as to enable the nation to make its fullest contribution in the war to defend liberty throughout the world. All efforts made by the Congress to bring this about had failed, and the Working Committee viewed with grave apprehension "the wide-spread ill-will against Britain and a growing satisfaction at the success of the Japanese armies". It might be mentioned, in passing, that this part of the Congress resolution was deliberately twisted by Government of India in their instructions to all Provincial Governments to counter the Congress movement. They said that the Congress was intentionally fostering ill-will towards Britain and satisfaction at Japanese success !

The Working Committee said in conclusion :

"Should, however, this appeal fail, the Congress cannot view without the gravest apprehension the continuation of the state of affairs involving a progressive deterioration in the situation and the weakening of India's will and power to resist aggression. The Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilize all the non-violent strength it might have gathered since 1920 when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy for the vindication of the political rights and liberty. Such a widespread struggle would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. As the issues raised are of the most vital and far-reaching importance to

the people of India as well as to the people of the United Nations, the Working Committee refers them to the All-India Congress Committee for final decision. For this purpose, the All-India Congress Committee will meet on August 7, 1942."

To realise the seriousness of the situation one has to remember the steady deterioration in the condition of the people of our country ever since the threat of war came to Indian shores. The food situation was steadily getting worse. The cost of living rose to three times what it had been formerly. Profiteering and exploitation went unchecked. Panic and distress followed close on each other's heels, and yet Government was apparently content to look on. Even so moderate a critic as Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru observed: "I have often wondered why between May and August, 1942, when things reached a crisis, no step was taken by Government of India or the Secretary of State to deal with that situation". The bewilderment of Sir Tej was the result of his assumption, as an axiomatic truth, of Britain's good intentions. But the fact was that in 1942 the bureaucracy in India, at least, had decided "to teach these Congress-wallahs a lesson".

Within a week of the Working Committee's resolution of 14th July, the Government of the Central Provinces issued instructions, on 19th July, to all Deputy Commissioners for dealing with the civil disobedience movement foreshadowed in the resolution. The Chief Secretary said: "You will observe that the Resolution contains a threat of civil disobedience which may or may not materialise. There is, however, an interval of about three weeks before the matter comes up for discussion by the All-India Congress Committee. Government desires that you should unostentatiously mobilise all possible elements in opposition to the Congress through the National War Front and other organizations". The Deputy Commissioners were asked to prepare lists of the opponents of Government in each district. The general lines of propaganda to counter-act the Congress were suggested by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry of Government of India. Three main objectives were laid down; to encourage those on whose support Government could depend, to win over the waverers and to avoid stiffening the determination of the Congress. They gave detailed "talking points" on the Congress Resolution, some of which are amusing. They wanted it to be argued that there was nothing democratic about the Congress resolution; that it was a mere 'clap-trap' of a party manifesto. They approvingly quoted Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, who had described the 1940 Satyagraha as 'a stab in the back of the British'.

Apart from tuning up the propaganda machinery, Government had made their plans to take swift and summary action with all their force. They had performed it in a somewhat similar way ten years ago when Gandhiji returned from the Round Table Conference. But now it was going to be even more drastic because the Congress appeared now to be stronger. They promptly took hold of some phrases used by the leaders as an excuse. Soon after the Wardha meeting of the Working Committee on July 14th Gandhiji had told the press correspondents that the Congress proposal now was to be a final struggle. "There is no room left in the proposal for withdrawal or negotiation. There is no question of one more chance. After all it is an open rebellion." He had said elsewhere, "ours is an unarmed revolt against British rule. It will be a mass movement of a strictly non-violent character. It will include all that a mass movement can include". Words like 'revolt' and 'rebellion' were enough to make the British furious. But Gandhiji had also told the Congress: "I want you to adopt non-violence as a matter of policy. With me it is a creed but so far as you are concerned, I want you to accept it as a policy. As disciplined soldiers you must accept it *in toto*, and stick to it when you join the struggle".

Thus on both sides, on the part of Government and on the side of the Congress, there was anxious expectation of decisive developments at Bombay when the All-India Congress Committee met. The delegates who went to Bombay from the different provinces were not certain whether they would come back to their homes. The nation had been told to be prepared to face a fight to finish. Three days before the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, Sardar Patel addressed a students' meeting at Ahmadabad, and called upon them to join in the struggle adopting any of the items in the Congress programme which they thought best suited to them. He warned them that the Congress might not be there to tell them what to do and what not to do. They must take the initiative and do what seemed proper in the light of all that Congress has stood for . . . . The newspapers might be suppressed; and it would be necessary for them to become walking newspapers to carry the message from house to house". In similar, if not the same words, the leaders in every province gave the people their parting precepts. In Madhya Pradesh, the leaders from Raipur, Jabalpur, Nagpur, Amravati, took train to Bombay after telling the people to carry on the struggle in case they did not return to lead them.

Such was the mood in which the members of the All-India Congress Committee gathered at Bombay. They assembled in a spacious pandal on the Gawalia Tank Maidan, nearly 250 members. There were over ten thousand visitors besides. Newspaper correspondents from distant parts of the world were there in large numbers to flash the news of the momentous decisions to the waiting world. All through the day on 7th August and late into the night the Committee discussed the Resolution passed at Wardha. Maulana Azad presided and explained the Wardha Resolution, and said that the slogan "Quit India" meant nothing more and nothing less than the complete transfer of power to Indian hands." After Gandhiji had explained the spirit and purpose behind the resolution, Jawaharlal Nehru moved it. He exposed the utter inefficiency of the way the war was conducted. He said, "The Congress was plunging into a stormy ocean and it would either emerge with a Free India or go down. Unlike in the past, it was not going to be a movement for a few days, to be suspended and talked over. It was going to be a fight to the finish. The Congress had now burnt its boats and was about to embark on a desperate campaign". Sardar Patel warned the people that the fight before them was going to be a tough one, and as Mahatma Gandhi had emphasised, it should be short and swift. Late in the night of August 8th all the amendments were either rejected or withdrawn, and the "Quit India" resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority, only thirteen voting against it. Thereafter, Gandhiji gave them a stirring exhortation: "Let every Indian consider himself to be a free man. He must be ready for the actual attainment of freedom or perish in the attempt . . . . There is to be no more bargaining. There is no compromise on the demand for freedom. Freedom first, and then only the rest. I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete freedom. We shall do or die." Seated on the elevated dais facing the tense and expectant gathering of many thousands, his face composed and refulgent, suffused with a light of benediction that appeared not to belong to this world, the picture of Gandhiji uttering these words imprinted itself on the minds of every one present. In the dark days that ensued, when many of them were in a state of living death inside the prisons, this inspiring picture abided with them to put courage and faith into their hearts.

Near midnight the members of the All-India Congress Committee dispersed to their different abodes, their minds and hearts uplifted by the tense emotions of the last two days. There was the

exhilarating expectation of a final plunge; there were grim forebodings of a desperate struggle. But the predominant mood was one of exultation and relief: relief from months of helpless watching while the country was going deeper into hardship and depression; and exultation of doing something concrete and positive to pull the country out of this despondency.

Though the resolution had been passed, it was not to take effect immediately. It was part of the principle of satyagraha that the opponent should be given every possible chance to amend his ways. Therefore Gandhiji had contemplated writing to the Viceroy and, if possible, seeking an interview with him before putting the Resolution into effect. But Government was not in a mood to reason about it. Their intention was to teach the Congress a lesson, and "they shall damn well have it". The instruments of repression struck suddenly in the dark. During the small hours of the morning of the 9th August all the top leaders of the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, members of the Working Committee, and about twenty other leaders, were arrested in Bombay while they slept, and taken to Poona by a special train. The fight had begun, precipitated by the rash and provocative act of Government. It is necessary to remember that though the All-India Congress Committee, sanctioned "the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale", no movement was actually started or ordered by the Congress. But Government had decided that the mere passing of the resolution was itself an impardonable affront, and it would have no truck with such "disloyal" elements. They had already prepared a long *communique* which they released at the very moment the All-India Congress Committee passed its resolution. The closed and perverse mind of Government is evident from certain portions of the *Communique*:

"For the demand of the Congress leaders there is no warrant. In the view of the Government of India, that demand is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with a full sense of responsibility on the part of the leaders of the Congress Party or a full appreciation by them of the realities of the present situation.

"The Congress Party is not India's mouthpiece. Yet in the interests of securing their own dominance and in pursuit of their totalitarian policy, its leaders have consistently impeded the efforts made to bring India to nationhood."

So, with righteous anger Government let loose its forces of repression. India awoke on 9th August to see the full fury of repression lashing the country. The delegates from many parts



of Madhya Pradesh were lodged at "Sardar Griha" in Bombay, and they came out to see the whole city in a state of commotion and upheaval. They joined the huge stream of people marching along the streets, and found themselves, willy-nilly, leading the demonstrations. The whole day the city of Bombay, and indeed the whole country was in an uproar. The next day Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, D. P. Mishra and other leaders of Madhya Pradesh decided to return to their own province to face the orgy of repression there. When Pandit Shukla proceeded to buy their railway tickets to Nagpur, D. P. Mishra suggested that it would be a waste of money to take their tickets thus far, because the open arms of the police were bound to be waiting for them at the first railway station inside Central Provinces territory. So they decided to buy tickets up to Malkapur. Sure enough, as the train steamed into Malkapur early next morning, they saw the police lined up with a European District Superintendent of Police at their head, ready to receive them. The English officer was beaming with delight at having taken them by surprise, as he thought. But the smile vanished from his face when he saw that all his prisoners had tickets only up to Malkapur. D. P. Mishra added to his discomfiture by saying that "they had fully expected to do the rest of the journey at Government's expense".

An incident that occurred while this arrogant Superintendent of Police was escorting the prisoners to Nagpur Jail has been twisted and misrepresented by Government in the official "Report on Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances" issued by R. Tottenham, Home Secretary of Government of India. He said, "Pandit R. S. Shukla, the former Congress Premier of the Central Provinces, told the police officer in whose custody he was, that if they had been given ten days' time instead of being arrested on their way back from Bombay, every police station in the district would have been burnt down". This, of course, was a complete travesty of what was actually said. The Police Superintendent had been deliberately rude in his behaviour, and had twitted the Congress about ever being capable of an open rebellion. Pandit Shukla whose rage boiled up at this impertinence, said that it was lucky for the British that Congress was wedded to non-violence. If it had not been so, there would have been such a rebellion that every police station in the country would have been burnt down. The Superintendent of Police, either because he was dull-witted or out for mischief, reported it in the way Tottenham put it in his Report.

It would not be possible to record every incident that happened during the terrible weeks that followed. Wholesale arrests of Congressmen began in every Province. Thus at a time when the whole nation was ready to rise in the biggest mass movement in India's struggle for freedom, all the familiar and trusted leaders whose directions they had been wont to follow in the past were behind the bars. No doubt, for some months the country had been expectantly waiting for this movement. But it was to have been led and directed by Gandhiji. No instructions had been left behind about the lines the movement should follow. Thus the 1942 may well be described as a spontaneous, voluntary, mass movement that sprang from the national urge for freedom. In that sense it truly was a people's movement. In every town, tahsil and village the people organised themselves and conducted the fight. They knew that the basis of India's protest was its refusal to be a party to an imperialist war into which she had been drawn without her consent. Therefore, the form the movement should take, was the obstruction of the war effort. By this simple logic the people started dislocating communications, attacking police stations, destroying Government records and refusing to render any help to Government. No doubt the movement often transgressed the principle of non-violence. But it was invariably the result of provocative action by the police. Violence by the police led to angry retaliation by the mob, and that in its turn made authority more brutal.

Thus the spiral of crime and violence rose higher. For about three weeks in August the law of the jungle prevailed in many parts of this province. In the capital of Nagpur for a few days from 12th August there was indiscriminate firing. Milkmen on their morning rounds, telegraph mechanics repairing the wires, women and children in the streets were shot down, and the officers assembled in the clubs in the evening to compare notes on each other's "bag" for the day.

This phenomenal mass movement sprang up almost simultaneously in every district, and although there was no concerted plan it took a uniform pattern. In Betul district a large crowd collected in the village Nahia. The local authority was alarmed. A Special Armed Force was dispatched from Nagpur which, on reaching there, opened fire on the crowd, killing two persons. The trouble spread to Pattan, another neighbouring village, and again firing was resorted to by the police killing one person. At other places lathi-charges were made and large numbers were indiscriminately arrested. The trouble became particularly serious at

Ghodadongri where the railway station and a large stack of timber were set on fire. The police broke up the crowd by opening fire, and arrested over a hundred persons including their leader, Vishnu Singh, who was sentenced to death. The sentence was later reduced to transportation for life, but when freedom came in 1947, the people's Government released him.

While these events were happening in Betul, the drama was being repeated in Mandla, Nagpur and Jabalpur. In Mandla, on 15th August, a crowd of about fifteen hundred led by the Vice-President of the District Congress Committee proceeded to the Government offices, destroyed Government records, disrupted the railway and telegraph communications and advanced towards the town. The police opened fire on the crowd wounding a number of persons and killing young Uday Singh Jain. In very rare cases the situation was prevented from developing into serious dimensions by the bold and tactful handling by Indian officers. For instance, in Sagar the tragedy of Betul and Mandla would have been repeated if the police had been precipitately ordered to open fire, as indeed the European Police Superintendent desired. But the Deputy Commissioner, being an Indian, approached the huge crowd which was intent on marching to the district offices, arrested all of them, and confined them within a large compound and later let them off. That saved Sagar from a blood-bath, but it apparently did not save the officer from British disfavour.

In Jabalpur the situation threatened to get out of hand as soon as the news of the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders reached the town, followed by the arrest of Seth Govind Das. A protest meeting was held on Tilak Bhumi where more arrests took place. The next day another meeting at the same place was dispersed by tear-gas bombs. A curfew was ordered, but that did not prevent defiant crowds cutting telegraph and telephone wires at Lordgang area, and attacking a police *chowki*. This brought the military on the scene, and they were posted at all strategic points and at Government buildings. In spite of all this two processions formed themselves on 14th August and marched through the streets. The police opened fire on them, but fortunately none was killed, though many were wounded.

In Ramtek in Nagpur district, events took a serious turn, for at a time the people had taken complete possession of the place rendering the local authorities completely powerless. It was due to the arrest of some prominent leaders against which the people

protested. A large crowd assembled in Gandhi chowk and marched towards the railway station from where the arrested persons were being taken away. They attacked the railway train, broke open the compartments and set the arrested leaders free. The railway station was then the target of their attack. Telephone and telegraph wires were cut, the guard and the station master were made to burn their uniforms and were given Khadi uniforms instead. The municipal office and the post office were attacked and large quantities of furniture and records burnt. Not content with this, they advanced towards the tahsil office and hoisted the national flag on the building. Finally they attacked and burnt the police station and took possession of the arms they found there. Thus for a time the people were the law in Ramtek. But the next day a large police reinforcement reached Ramtek in spite of the road blocks which had been erected by the people. Nearly a hundred persons were arrested and confined in small cells and subjected to much torture. Most of the arrested persons were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, while six of them, including Surajmal Gupta, Bajirao Bisan, Hari Shivram Awari and Shivalal Teli were sentenced to transportation for life. The last mentioned, however, died while he was in prison owing to the torture and ill-treatment by the police.

The atrocities that took place at Chimur in Chanda district, and at Ashti in Wardha district, on Nag Panchami day, 16th August 1942, have been made sufficiently familiar by the long drawn-out trials and the inhuman sentences passed on the arrested persons. At both these places the course of events was strikingly similar. A procession or demonstration by the people was dispersed and put down with excessive violence. The indignant people in their fury set fire to the police station. At both the places the officers inside the station-house were burnt alive. This shocking act let loose the terror. The military took charge, and for a few days they perpetrated such bestial crimes as are a disgrace to the human race. The Government lost their head. When the Chanda Bar Association protested against the Chimur atrocities and politely asked for a judicial enquiry, the Government came down heavily upon the Association and said "that it has no intention of holding a judicial or any other enquiry into the measures which have so far been taken by the Military and the Police to restore order . . . . The police and military have had a very difficult task to do and have shown exemplary courage and consideration in the face of prolonged toil and provocation". Not content with this, the Governor threatened that if the Bar Association continued to be recalcitrant he would consider declaring it an unlawful

association, and any one who continued to be a member would be prosecuted. Thus the Government thundered, and all protest was silenced.

Another centre in Madhya Pradesh where the movement developed considerable intensity was the village Yaoli, in Amravati district. On 15th August, Satyagraha was organised in this village by Punjabrao Yaollikar. A large procession started and took possession of the school, the post office and the Patel's record. Telegraph posts were pulled down and the whole village was taken possession of by the people. When the news reached Amravati, a large police force arrived the next day and fired 59 rounds killing ten persons and wounding twenty-two. Even this did not suppress the spirit of the people who, on the 18th August, hoisted the National Flag and held a meeting. This led to a battle between the police and the people in which five were killed and thirty injured. Similar atrocities by the police took place in Bhandara, and in almost every important town in the province.

Nagpur was in a state of uprising from the 12th August. Processions began to march out from different points in the city parading through the streets and cutting down telegraph wires. On the same day the Itwari Railway Station Godown and Post Office were set on fire. The police *chowkis* at different places in the town were the targets of attack. After destroying most of them the huge procession marched towards the District Court and hoisted the national flag on the court buildings. For nearly 48 hours it appeared as if the British rule did not exist in Nagpur. The Government offices, schools and colleges were all closed. But then the authority began to act vigorously. The military was brought in and posted all over the city. The law and order responsibility was handed over to the Commander and indiscriminate firing started in the city. Curfew was imposed and assembly of five persons and more banned. All these measures no doubt had the effect of bringing about an appearance of quiet although the life in the city had come to a standstill. For weeks together no students would go to colleges or schools until Government were compelled to issue an order saying that if the students did not come back to the schools, their names would be struck off the rolls. But even this did not have much effect and practically till the end of the academic year, all educational institutions were deserted.

One consequence of the ruthless policy of repression was to drive underground the extremist elements in the freedom struggle. It would appear that after the arrest of Gandhiji and the other

Congress leaders, some of the Congress workers hailing from different provinces and staying at "Sardar Griha" in Bombay met together and decided to go underground. Prominent among them were Shri Ram Sharma, Ramanandan Mishra, Jagan Prasad Raut, Thakur Niranjan Singh, Sahasrabudhe and Satyendra Prasad Mishra. They were to work underground in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Thakur Niranjan Singh secured the funds of the Mahakoshal Congress Committee from a private business firm for conducting the movement. There were others of a more desperate temperament who were led to take even to violence according to a concerted revolutionary plan.

The plan was to procure arms and ammunition from all possible sources. The non-British ports such as Goa were a readily available source. Some Indian officers occupying high positions in neighbour Indian States were also helpful, as the Arms Act did not apply to those States. A blacksmith from Agra set up a factory in Dhar to manufacture arms. An engineer who belonged to Narsinghpur went to Karachi and specialised in the technique of sabotage. Nagpur was the centre for supplying dynamite because of the neighbouring mines. For transporting the arms and ammunition ingenious methods were adopted. Many educated and enterprising girls freely travelled from one place to another unsuspected hiding on their persons arms and ammunition. The youth of the country especially threw themselves into this underground activity with zeal and devotion and had the supreme satisfaction of being participators in the thrilling adventure. In the All-India sphere, Aruna Asaf Ali, Achyut Patwardhan, Meher Ali, Jayaprakash Narayan were the guiding spirits of this movement.

In Nagpur the underground activity was mainly directed by the Hindustan Red Army led by Maganlal Bagdi which had played an important part in the 1941 satyagraha as well. But by 1942 it had become well organised and had about 1,400 trained and disciplined volunteers. Their first targets usually were the police stations from where they seized arms. This supply was augmented by the efforts of Maganlal Bagdi in obtaining arms from Goa. The Red Army successfully attacked the Nawabpura police station where, however, one of their zealous workers, Shankar, a young man of twenty-one, was arrested and subsequently hanged. All efforts to save him failed. They later attacked the Mauda police station and the Craddock Town post office. The Government announced a reward for the arrest of Maganlal Bagdi and four

of his colleagues. But though they were on the outskirts of Nagpur, they could not be arrested till July 1943 when they were captured in Bombay and charged with "waging war against the king" and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Maganlal Bagdi was sentenced to transportation for life.

Among other organizations that took part in the movement was the Hanuman Vyayam Mandal of Amravati. The training classes conducted by the Mandal were attended by young men from neighbouring provinces; and they were well trained in drill, rifle-practice and physical culture. During the 1942 movement several members of this organisation were arrested for sabotage in Bombay province. Thus under a variety of leadership, born out of the nation-wide discontent and sense of revolt, the movement grew in dimensions. Strikes broke out in large industries including the Tata Iron and Steel Works and the Cotton Mills. Riots took place almost in every large city. Government mowed down the rioters from aeroplanes with machine-guns. By the end of December 1942, about 60,000 persons had been arrested, 940 killed and 1,630 wounded. Police and troops had opened fire on 538 occasions, and as many as 958 persons had been punished with whippings. In many parts of India, particularly in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh, the ravages of the reign of terror were visible long after the repression was over. Charred ruins and rubble marked the places where once prosperous villages stood. For miles together there was nothing but desolation. One Jalianwalabagh was horrible enough in 1919, but it appeared that now the whole country was dotted with hundreds of Jalianwalabaghs.

Meanwhile how did the British Government react to all this? On 10th September Churchill made the outrageous statement: "The Hindu Congress Party does not represent all India. It does not represent the majority of the people of India. It does not even represent the Hindu masses. It is a political organization built around a party machine and sustained by certain manufacturing and financial interests". This amazing statement together with the other in which he refused to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire, makes a complete picture of Churchill's testament of India. Where India was concerned Churchill was ever intemperate, unjust and blind. Not all the adversity that England had been through improved him. Like the Bourbons, he learnt nothing and forgot nothing. One particular reaction it produced was significant. The Premier of Sind, Allah Bux, protested against Churchill's scornful references to India and the

Congress, and renounced the honours which he had received from the Government. The Viceroy replied by peremptorily dismissing him from office. The English Weekly, *New Statesman and Nation* commented on this saying, "By this unhappy performance we tempt Indians to conclude that Ministers in the Provinces must be our puppets. . . . We have assuredly lowered the prestige of the Ministers at a time when we ought to have fostered it."

Gandhiji in prison read in the newspapers the upheaval in the country and the attitude the Government were taking. He wrote to the Viceroy on 23rd September, "The wholesale arrest of the Congress leaders seems to have made the people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control. I feel that the Government, not the Congress, are responsible for the destruction that has taken place. The only right course for the Government seems to me to be to release the Congress leaders, withdraw all repressive measures and explore ways and means of reconciliation". This earnest offer produced no response from the Viceroy. In fact, this letter was not even published later when the correspondence was released to the press. Other leaders in the country, Rajagopalachari, humanitarians like the Metropolitan for India, the Liberals, appealed to the Government to end the deadlock, but the Viceroy was adamant. As summed up by a publicist, "To keep Congress leaders locked up and allow no outsiders any access to them, to repeat the slogan that unless all parties agree the Government cannot do anything, to do nothing themselves to promote this agreement or even popularize the administration, and to go on indefinitely with the present administration which vests all power and authority in the Viceroy and the Governors—that sums up the Government's policy." (*India Unreconciled*, p. 21.)

The dawn of 1943 saw no abating of the nation-wide unrest. Students lawyers, school teachers, the man in the street, everyone was swept into the tremendous tide. Then the nation heard for the first time on 10th February 1943, through a Press Communique issued by the Government of India, that Gandhiji had decided to undertake a fast for three weeks from that date. Simultaneously Government also released the correspondence between Gandhiji and Government leading to this decision. The fast produced a great effect upon the country and the world. There was a long and heated debate in the Central Assembly. On the sixth day of the fast three Indian Members of the Viceroy's Council—H. P. Mody, N. R. Sarkar and M. S. Aney—resigned their membership as a protest against Government's attitude. As days



passed by the condition of Gandhiji began to cause anxiety. On the eleventh day, Linlithgow rejected all suggestions to release him. Crowds began to gather every day in solemn silence round Yera-vada. Gandhiji appeared to be sinking: doctors stood round helplessly. But the miracle happened. On 2nd March, he completed the three weeks' fast, and sipped slowly a glass of orange juice that Kasturba gave him.

Meanwhile the tide of war had begun to turn. The Japanese advance had been stopped, and their bases were being attacked from the air. In Indonesia they received a set-back. On the western front the Germans came up against the impregnable might of Russia, and at Stalingrad they met their Waterloo. On 18th June 1943, the appointment was announced of Field-Marshal Wavell as Viceroy in succession to Linlithgow. Wavell's triumphs in the African War had changed the complexion of the situation in the Mediterranean. His appointment in India was, no doubt, expected to pave the way to victory over Japan. With him also came General Auchinleck who was appointed Commander-in-Chief in India. Thus, the long and unhappy regime of Linlithgow came to an end. Never had a Viceregal term begun with such high expectations and ended with such a dismal and bitter disappointment. The farewell letter that Gandhiji wrote to him from prison is worth reproducing, because of the poignancy of its sentiment, so unusual in him. He wrote on September 27, 1943: "Of all the high functionaries I have had the honour of knowing none has been the cause of such deep sorrow to me as you have been. It has cut me to the quick to have to think of you as having countenanced untruth, and that regarding one whom you at one time considered your friend. I hope and pray that God will some day put it into your heart to realize that you, a representative of a great nation, have been led into a grievous error".

Words had ceased to have any effect on the British. All the leaders of India continued to languish in jails. Some of them were moved about from one prison to another, for no apparent reason. Earlier in their term of incarceration the Madhya Pradesh leaders, including Pandit Shukla, had been sent away to a jail in Vellore, while some of the leaders of Madras were brought to this province. The intention was, apparently, to prevent the leaders from exerting their influence on the people by their mere presence in the province.

Months passed by: sullen, suppressed India now and then erupted in brief outbursts of anger, only soon to be silenced. Bengal witnessed one of the worst famines in the long record of

famines in our country. An estimate put the number of persons who died of famine and starvation by the end of 1943 at more than fifty lakhs. Death also took its toll in prison. Mahadev Desai had died some months ago, suddenly as a result of a heart-attack. The blow fell heavily on Gandhiji. But more sorrow was in store. On 22nd February 1944, Kasturba died in prison. The new Viceroy, Wavell, wrote a letter in sympathy which seemed to ring true: Gandhiji acknowledged it in generous terms. But soon he himself was seriously ill: on May 3rd, the doctors considered his condition grave. On 6th May, Government ordered his unconditional release, and he was taken to Juhu where the slowly regained his health.

1944 saw the beginning of the end of the war, both in Europe and in the Far East. Early in the year the Japanese had come up to Imphal and almost captured Kohima. But with the onset of the monsoon, they suddenly withdrew. It is believed that one of the reasons for this withdrawal was the attitude of the Indian National Army which had been operating along with the Japanese under the Command of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. To what extent the part played by this remarkable and almost legendary leader and his army contributed to India's achievement of freedom it would be difficult to assess precisely, because so much of their plans and activities has been shrouded in secrecy. But there is no doubt that his amazing escape from internment in India, his activities in Germany, Japan, China and the Far East, his mobilising a large army under his leadership, had filled the country with admiration, and put heart into the people at a time when merciless repression had almost crushed their spirits.

It is not necessary for the purpose of this history to trace the tortuous course of negotiations with Jinnah on the subject of Communal Settlement. The efforts of Rajagopalachari ended in a stalemate. The correspondence with Jinnah which Gandhiji attempted to carry on from jail was blocked by Government and the ruffled temper of Jinnah was promptly deflated by Government's unconcern. Fresh talks ensued after Gandhiji's release but it led to no better purpose. The paths of Jinnah and of the Indian people had become wholly divergent.

Thus, the matters stood when the war in Europe ended. This was followed by the victory over Japan in the East. The world had emerged, scarred and devastated no doubt, but unbroken in its defence of freedom; and hopes were raised of a new beginning in the building of peace.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### FREEDOM CAME

The era of frustration seemed to have ended. A positive effort to break new ground and do something concrete to resolve the Indian tangle seemed to be afoot. In March 1945, Wavell went to London. A "Caretaker" Government had taken the place of the Coalition in England. Preparations were on for the General Election. In the midst of these pre-occupations, a plan for the solution of India's deadlock was drawn up between Amery and Wavell. Presumably, it was meant to help them in the elections. Be that as it may, Wavell returned to India in June and announced the new plan in a broadcast on 14th June. It was an amplification of the short-term proposals in the Cripps Officer, with this material difference that the Indian members in the Viceroy's Council will represent the main parties. On the basis of this plan, discussions opened in Simla on 25th June. The members of the Congress Working Committee had been released earlier. The former Premiers of the Congress majority provinces were also released to enable them to be present at Simla. The talks soon revealed the inflexible position taken by Jinnah on the issue of the exclusive right of the League to nominate the Muslim members. Wavell had to confess his failure, which he did on 14th July. With commendable humility he said, "I wish to make it clear that the responsibility for failure is mine". The fact was, that Jinnah would not look at any plan which was likely to give the Congress a decisive voice in Government. Though, he might be given parity with Hindus in the Executive Council, he knew that the Muslims would, on the whole, be in a minority because the other members—Scheduled Castes, Christians and Sikhs—would be with the Congress on fundamental issues. The policy of Jinnah was not so much to acquire power for himself, as to deny it to his opponents. As regards the Congress view, impartial observers testified to its extremely reasonable stand. As one commentator said:

"Congress displayed the flair which seldom deserted it for presenting its case before the world in the most favourable light; there is no denying that its leaders showed considerable political wisdom. With its whole organisation, except for its Working Committee, still under the ban, with its leaders only just released from prison, its attitude was nevertheless moderate

and free from bitterness." (E. W. R. Lumby: *Transfer of Power in India*, p. 52.)

The first move, having thus been checkmated, another opening would be possible only in the light of the verdict of the electorate which had not for a long time been sounded. The Central Assembly had been elected more than ten years ago, in 1934. The provincial legislatures had been last formed in 1937. Elections to both were, therefore, long overdue. While the Japanese war was still on, there was no possibility of going to the polls. But suddenly, following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered on 15th August. A week later, the Viceroy announced that the Central and Provincial elections would be held as soon as possible.

The General Elections had, in the meanwhile, taken place in England, and with characteristic political wisdom the electorate had decided to set Churchill and his party aside, and put the Labour Party in power with a clear majority. On 3rd August 1945, Attlee formed his Cabinet and Pethick Lawrence became Secretary of State for India. Wavell again acted expeditiously. He summoned the Governors to a conference, announced that elections would be held, ordered the revision of electoral rolls. He also decided with the Governors the question of the release of political prisoners and the removal of the ban on Congress organizations. This done, he once again went to London in response to a call from the new Cabinet. On his return to India, he announced on 19th September the British Government's determination to do their utmost to promote the early realisation of full self-government in India. He said further:

"It is the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene, as soon as possible, a Constitution-making body. . . . We must first hold election so that the will of the Indian electorate may be known. . . . After the elections, I propose to hold discussions with the representatives of those elected, and of the Indian States, to determine the form which the Constitution-making body should take, its powers and procedure."

Meanwhile, the pattern of political opinion in India was becoming more and more clearly defined. On the issue of a divided India the Congress opinion was expressed at the meeting of the Working Committee in September 1945, at Bombay. It said:

"Further, as declared by the All-India Congress Committee, at its meeting held in Allahabad, in May 1942, the Congress cannot agree to any proposal to disintegrate India by giving liberty to any component State or territorial unit to secede from the Indian Union or Federation. Congress, as the Working Committee declared in April 1942, has been wedded to Indian freedom and unity and any break in that unity, especially in a modern world when people's minds inevitably think in terms of ever larger federations, would be injurious to all concerned, and exceedingly painful to contemplate.

"Nevertheless, the Committee also declared that it cannot think in terms of compelling people in any territorial unit to remain in the Indian Union against their declared and established will.

"While recognising this principle, every effort should be made to create conditions which would help the different units in developing a common and co-operative national life. Acceptance of this principle inevitably involves that no changes should be made which would result in fresh problems being created and compulsion being exercised on other substantial groups within that area. Each territorial unit should have the fullest possible autonomy within the Union consistently with a strong national State."

The election manifesto did not touch on this issue because the plank on which Congress decided to fight the election was Independence. But the manifesto did refer to the Federation of India as "a willing union of its various parts."

The pre-election period was marked by a series of events which did not help in fostering confidence between India and Britain. India protested against the use of Indian troops in Indonesia and Indo-China in defence of the colonial powers of Holland and France, against the peoples of those countries. The trial of the officers of the Indian National Army was strongly resented by the Congress who set up a Defence Committee consisting of an imposing array of lawyers including Bhulabhai Desai, Dr. Katju, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru. The Indian National Army prisoners became national heroes. Students in all the large cities organised demonstrations in sympathy with the Indian National Army undertrials, and in Calcutta they led to serious disturbances lasting several days. Against this background came the announcement of a Parliamentary Delegation to

visit India in order to establish, so it was said, personal contact between India and British Parliament. It was a rather undistinguished group, meant to represent all political parties in Britain. They went about meeting a variety of persons in India during the months of January and February 1946, and must have been rather uneasy of the violent and revolutionary possibilities in what they saw and heard.

For, it was about that time that a serious, though short-lived, revolt took place in the Indian Navy at Bombay. About three thousand ratings from H.M.I.S. *Talwar* started a strike in protest against the ill-treatment and bad food which they were given. Others too joined them, so that nearly twenty thousand men representing the entire personnel of the Royal Indian Navy were involved in this revolt. In sympathy with them the personnel of the Air Force also joined them. The trouble continued for three days, and at one moment it developed into a pitched battle between the Naval ratings and the British military. In this tense situation Sardar Patel was approached to intervene. His appeal to the strikers had a good effect at once, and by the 26th the situation was completely quiet.

The next day, 27th February, a sympathetic strike started in the Indian Signal Corps at Jabalpur. The strikers marched in an orderly fashion and held a meeting protesting against the treatment meted out to the Naval ratings, and making their own demands for better pay, rations and housing arrangements. One of the strikers said "Although we all are born as slaves we do not want to die as slaves and we shall shed the last drop of our blood for our country's sake." The whole demonstration was entirely peaceful and disciplined and created a great impression.

Such were some of the scenes that the Parliamentary Delegation saw during their brief sojourn and on their return to England they surely would have passed on their impressions to the British Government. The elections in India were significant pointers to the line-up of political opinion. The Congress won all the general seats in the Central Assembly and even a few reserved for special interests. In the provinces its success was even greater than in 1936. In eight provinces Congress had an absolute majority, and these included two provinces which Muslims had claimed for Pakistan, the North-West Frontier Province and Assam. In Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly Congress won 94 out of 112 seats. Taking all the Provincial Assemblies together, Congress won 930 seats as against 704 in 1936. No doubt, the Muslim League had also established its right to speak for

the large majority of the Muslim population. Out of the 492 Muslim reserved seats in the Provincial Legislatures the League won 428 as against 109 in the 1936 elections. But what is significant is that the Congress had set up several Muslim candidates in the general constituencies and they too had won, thus proving the wholly non-communal stand of the Congress. In the eight Congress majority provinces ministries were set up. In Bengal and Sind the League, the largest single party, took office, while in the Punjab a Coalition Ministry in which the League did not join, was formed.

In Madhya Pradesh a Cabinet with Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla as Chief Minister was sworn in on 27th April 1946. The other Ministers in the Cabinet were D. P. Mishra, D. K. Mehta, S. V. Gokhale, R. K. Paril, P. K. Deshmukh, Dr. W. S. Barlingey and Dr. M. Hassan. One of the first steps which the new Government took in Madhya Pradesh was to release all political prisoners, withdraw all warrants against absconders in political cases and remit the collective fines which had been levied by the previous regime. It was a complex and difficult situation that the Ministries in the provinces had to face when they took office. The tremendous drain of our resources caused by the six years of war had impoverished the country. Famine stared in the face almost everywhere. The long neglect of all the nation-building spheres of activity had not only halted but retarded all improvement. The demobilised soldiers, the evacuated population from Burma and Malaya, the growing numbers of the unemployed and all the problems that follow in the wake of the termination of the war pressed for solution. Such was the legacy that the Provincial Government inherited. On top of all this were the suspicious fears and estrangement that divided the communities.

In this atmosphere were carried on the crucial talks with the Cabinet Mission which had arrived in India on 23rd March. Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and A. V. Alexander wrestled for days with the arguments and claims of various political leaders. There was unquestionable determination and goodwill on both sides to arrive at a solution of the Indian problem. The statement of the British Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee, made that very clear. India was to settle her own constitution, and to decide whether to remain in the Commonwealth or not. Besides, he gave proof of his personal earnestness by saying, "We cannot allow a minority to place a veto on the advance of the majority". The talks could not have had a more promising start. Nevertheless they dragged on inconclusively at Delhi for three weeks



and, after a break, were resumed in Simla, the Congress and Muslim League nominating four representatives each to continue the discussions. From 5th May to 12th May this tripartite conference discussed a scheme under which the country was to have a three-tier set-up, with Provinces, Groups and a Union. On May 12th, the talks broke down, and the Cabinet Mission moved to Delhi from where on 16th May they issued a statement which represented the largest area of agreement as it emerged during the discussions. The most important feature of it was the setting up of a Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for India, a demand which Congress had been making since 1936. The Statement also envisaged the formation of an Interim Government having the support of the major political parties so that maximum co-operation of the people may be secured in the numerous vital tasks of post-war development.

The proposals of the Cabinet Mission found a generally favourable reception from almost all sections of political opinion. Gandhiji said it contained "a seed to convert this land of sorrow into one without sorrow and suffering". As regards the long-term proposals contained in the Cabinet Mission's Statement there was little difficulty. Congress accepted it; so did the League. But the composition of the Interim Government proved to be a bone of fierce contention. The Viceroy's announcement of 16th June 1946 giving the names of fourteen persons whom he had invited to join the Interim Government contained a proviso that:

"in the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a Coalition Government on the above lines, it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the Statement of May 16th."

Nevertheless stiff opposition to the composition of the Interim Government as proposed by the Viceroy came from Jinnah as well as the Congress. The crux of the matter was the right of the Congress to nominate a non-League Muslim on the Interim Cabinet. Jinnah would have nothing of it. After the 1946 elections Jinnah and the Muslim League had become increasingly strident in their claim as the only organization entitled to speak for the Muslims. In April a Convention of Muslim League Legislators was held in Delhi where Jinnah gloated over the victory of the League candidates. "We have routed our opponents in every battle-field"—Jinnah was always fond of a martial phraseology—

"and today a historic record stands that we have captured something like ninety per cent of Muslim seats". Flushed with this feeling it was no wonder that in all the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission Jinnah adopted an aggressive and offensive manner.

In marked contrast to the League, the All-India Congress Committee met in Bombay on 6th July, 1946, with an awareness of the historic gravity of the occasion. Jawaharlal Nehru was the president-elect for the year, Maluana Azad having laid down office after holding it during the most stirring and eventful period of over six years of our recent history. "We are on the threshold of our freedom," said the retiring President, "Our freedom is coming not because of inter-national changes but because of the revolution that has taken place in our own country resulting in a great national awakening". President Nehru too emphasised the seriousness of the moment. "The British regime in India is beginning to end. The curtain is being rung down. This is a delicate moment when we should muster all our strength and show no weakness". The All-India Congress Committee decided to join the Constituent Assembly "for framing the constitution of a free, united and democratic India", but it was unable to accept the June 16th proposals for the formation of an Interim Government.

When the Cabinet Mission, after over three months of intense negotiations left India on June 19th, the only tangible result appeared to be the decision to set up the Constituent Assembly. The Interim Government could not come into being, in spite of a last minute manoeuvre by Jinnah to walk into it without the Congress, which proved abortive. Dictated by chagrin at this failure, the League decided to resort to "direct action" to achieve its object. August 16th was fixed as the date on which Muslims throughout India were to take to direct action. A press correspondent asked Khwaja Nazimuddin of Bengal what was meant by direct action, to which he replied, "there are hundred and one ways in which we can create difficulties, specially when we are not restricted to non-violence. The Muslim population of Bengal knows very well what Direct Action would mean, and we need not bother to give them a lead". That was ominous enough, and **सीधी चोट** was the translation that Sardar Patel gave of it. Bengal was particularly chosen as the place where direct action was to be enacted. The League held power there. For a whole fortnight the poison of hatred was broadcast among the Muslims, through speeches, hand-bills, pamphlets and inflaming articles in the Press. The horrible tragedy of the "Great Calcutta Killing" which lasted for three days, was the direct result of this evil campaign. Encouraged and directed

by the League and aided by the Government, hell was let loose on Hindus. *The Statesman* of Calcutta, no lover of Hindus, said, "The present Muslim League Ministry's primary responsibility for the bloody shambles to which its capital had been reduced is inescapable". It is not necessary to narrate the atrocities perpetrated by League Muslims on that day. In retrospect these deeds constitute the Great Divide, the unbridgeable chasm that was cut into India's body. With the best will in the world, it appeared thereafter inevitable that there should be a division of the country. The Direct Action was directed not against the British authority to secure Pakistan, but against the Hindus to ensure, so far as the League was concerned, that there shall ever after be a blood feud between them. The Calcutta killing was repeated in a more brutal form against the Hindus at Naokhali and Tippera where nearly 80 per cent of the population were Muslims. These horrors found an inevitable reaction in Bihar and at Garmukteswar where the Hindus retaliated.

But by then the Interim Government had come into being. On 24th August, Wavell invited twelve leaders of his choice to form his Cabinet, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajgopalachari. This Government took office on 2nd September 1946. They had been prompted to take the responsibility of office mainly because of the utter failure of the former "Care-taker" Government to put down vigorously the horrors of Calcutta. Soon enough they were put to the test by the outbreak of violence in Bihar. The change was immediately felt. Much to the displeasure of some Hindus thirsting for revenge, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad rushed to Bihar and swiftly and firmly controlled the situation, while Gandhiji whose heart bled for the suffering people of East Bengal started on his Mission of Peace through Noakhali and Tippera, and later in Bihar.

It was to be expected that these horrors would send waves of reaction throughout the country. But nowhere else did violence of any magnitude occur, though the pockets of Muslim League raised cries of persecution. In Madhya Pradesh which, in the words of its Chief Minister, "has an enviable record of communal amity and concord" some tension prevailed, and isolated cases of disturbance occurred at Amravati, Katni, Badenera and Jabalpur. The Home Minister, Pandit D. P. Mishra, immediately gave an assurance that "the provincial Government were determined to discharge their primary duty of maintaining law and order and protecting all peaceful citizens without distinction of caste or creed". The League attempts to propagate stories of persecution

were exposed, and the local leader of the Muslim League, seeing that the game was up, agreed to issue a joint statement calling upon the people of both the communities to live in peace.

The spectacle of the Congress installed in power at Delhi was galling to Jinnah. In language which for falsehood and intemperate fury is unexcelled in political utterances, he spoke of "the caste Hindu fascist Congress and their few individual henchmen of other communities who want to be installed in power and authority in the Government of India to dominate and rule over Mussalmans and other minority communities of India, with the aid of British bayonets". By the end of October he sent in five of his nominees for inclusion in the Interim Government, and to spite the Congress, he sent the name of a Scheduled Caste Hindu of Dr. Ambedkar's party among the five. But the purpose of joining the Government was made clear by Jinnah: "We are going into the Interim Government to get a foot-hold to fight for our cherished goal of Pakistan". It was surely a major error of the Viceroy to have accepted the League entry without securing the withdrawal of the 'Direct Action' resolution, without getting their consent to co-operate in the Constituent Assembly, which was to meet on December 9th, and without ensuring the condition of a joint responsibility in practice. Jawaharlal Nehru was compelled to protest that since the entrance of the League nominees, Lord Wavell had been "removing one by one the wheels of the Cabinet coach."

The disillusion felt by the leaders of the Congress in the Interim Government found expression during the Meerut session of the Congress on 23rd November 1946. After six and a half years of war and upheaval the Indian National Congress was meeting for the first time. Speaking on the occasion Jawaharlal Nehru said "the atmosphere in the new Central Government after the League's entry has become so strained that Congress members had twice threatened to resign". Sardar Patel bluntly described the Wavell-League game as "an attempt to get the Congress out of the Interim Government". The attitude and actions of the Viceroy in these closing weeks of his term reveal more than ever the determination of the British to divide the country before they quit. In spite of the League's blank refusal to join the Constituent Assembly the League nominees were kept on in the Government. Constituent Assembly's work was impeded. It would appear that it was in pursuance of a tacit decision in London to divide India that the League was permitted to enter the Interim Government unconditionally. This intention became clear in an article in

*The Times* of London. It said: "The British cannot consent to hand over responsibility to a single political party without reference to the rights of other groups, or place the governance of the Muslim majority provinces at the unfettered discretion of a Hindu controlled Central Government. If the kind of agreement contained in the Cabinet Mission's proposals cannot be secured, the unity of India, which is a great achievement of the past century, must inevitably be sacrificed to the higher interests of elementary justice". There was not only premeditation but pleasure in the British mind at the prospective division of India. Churchill foretold with relish that "The unity of India was a superficial appearance imposed there by long generations of British rule, and it would pass away for long periods of time once the Imperial element of guidance from outside was withdrawn". It would rather appear that the break up of unity is one of the inevitable concomitants of a long period of Imperial guidance by Britain. They divided Ireland when they left that country. Palestine was divided when it became free; Indo-China has recently been divided after French Imperialism; and if the wishes of Britain were granted, they would also like to divide Kashmir. Divide and Quit appeared to be their farewell formula.

Britain had become convinced that it would not any longer be possible for her to rule India. The dissipated resources of Britain would not be able to maintain an apparatus of British Controlled Government. The war had shattered her economy and enfeebled her strength. The conditions in India were such that without the aid of unlimited military strength it could not be held against her will. The ravages of the war had caused in India a widespread dislocation of life and raised a host of complex problems which could not have been solved without enormous expenditure. The discontent in the country was acute, and even the popularly elected Governments in the provinces were baffled by the complexity and range of the public grievances. But they could at least call forth public enthusiasm by appeal to patriotic sentiment. A foreign Government would find it impossible. The recent revolts in the Navy, Air Force and the Army had given a glimpse of the disaffection that was growing even in defence forces. Above all the sacrifices and sufferings of the political struggle, the irresistible urge for liberty, the admirable example of courage and achievement of the I. N. A. and the awakening that had suddenly come over the whole of Asia created in India a force which made the departure of the foreign power inevitable. Therefore, on 20th February 1947 the British Prime Minister announced "that it is

the definite intention of His Majesty's Government to take necessary steps to effect the transference of power into responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June, 1948". At the same time he also announced the termination of Lord Wavell's appointment as Viceroy and the appointment of Lord Mountbatten as his successor. In the British Parliament the opposition to the transfer of power was voiced, as was to be expected, by Churchill. He said in his characteristic manner, "In handing over the Government of India to these so-called political classes, you are handing over to men of straw, of whom in a few years no trace will remain". Churchill himself has vanished from the world's stage, but these "men of straw" have today a place in the counsels of the world.

After the arrival of Lord Mountbatten in India on 23rd March 1947 events began to move with amazing speed. On his arrival the new Viceroy saw the first fruits of the British Government's announcement in the shape of the rioting and destruction in the Punjab. The League had forced the resignation of the Unionist Ministry and had formed a League controlled Government. Communal rioting followed, a foretaste of things to come. The League then turned its attention to the Congress Ministry in North-West Frontier Province. Violent clashes and disturbances took place, in order to discredit the Congress Government. Similar tactics were employed in Assam. The game was quite clear. This was another form of 'direct action' for securing power in those provinces which they claimed for Pakistan.

By now it had become clear that India had to be prepared for a partition. By the end of April the Congress leaders began to reconcile themselves to the idea. "The Muslim League can have Pakistan if they want it", said Jawaharlal Nehru curtly, "but on condition that they do not take away any other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan". This led to the demand that if Pakistan was to be carved out, the Hindu majority areas in the Punjab and Bengal would have to be detached from Pakistan. Curiously enough Jinnah opposed the proposal to divide Bengal and the Punjab with those very arguments which the Congress had used against his proposal to divide India. Meanwhile tension was mounting in all those areas which were to be affected by the partition. Lahore, Amritsar, Chittagong, Peshwar, were all in a perpetual state of anxiety. At the same time the administration of the Interim Government torn by mutual suspicion was breaking down. On 18th May Mountbatten left for London for final consultations. He returned to India on 30th May, and immediately

after on 2nd June he called to a conference at Delhi Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Acharya Kripalani who was President of the Congress for the year, M. A. Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, Abdur Rab Nishtar and Sardar Baldev Singh. After the conference with the leaders, the Viceroy announced on the next day, June 3rd, the British Government's plan for transfer of power, to a divided India, and the setting up of a Boundary Commission to determine the shape of the division. Meanwhile the Assemblies in Bengal and the Punjab would each meet in two parts, one representing the Muslim-majority districts and the other the rest of the province, and decide whether the province should be divided. If the decision was in favour of division, the two provinces would be provisionally divided on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim majority provinces. The statement also announced that the transfer of power would take place in 1947 itself.

The leaders of the Congress who were members of the Interim Government were convinced that it was in the interest of India to hasten the departure of the British. This conviction was brought home forcibly by the discovery, which Madhya Pradesh Government were instrumental in making, that certain nefarious plans were afoot in the Political Department. It came to the knowledge of the Provincial Government that there was a move for leasing to the Nizam for a long period of 99 years the vast natural resources of Bastar State. The Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, on knowing this immediately got in touch with Sardar Patel, who was the Home Minister of Government of India, and gave him all the details of this plan. Sardar Patel himself intervened in the matter just in time and stopped the Political Department from carrying it out. He observed in this connection:

"I came to the conclusion that the best course was to hasten the departure of these foreigners even at the cost of the partition of the country. It was at that time that I felt that the only way to make the country safe and strong was by the unification of the rest of India."

Thus, the Congress agreed with the Viceroy that the transfer of power should be effected as soon as possible. The successive steps for the partition and the transfer now came one after the other in quick succession. In July, the British Parliament put through an enabling Act to establish the two States. The process of dividing the whole structure of the administration including the assets was started at once. It is not necessary for the purpose of this narrative to trace the complex processes of the

division. But, at last, came the unforgettable day, the dawn of freedom. In Delhi, the Constituent Assembly met at midnight of 14th August in a mood of rejoicing and solemnity, and the members pledged themselves everlasting loyalty to the Free India that was being born. Early next morning, the tri-colour flag of India was hoisted on the ramparts of the historic Red Fort of Delhi, while the entire foreground was a mighty sea of human beings whose hearts were thrilled by the jubilant emotions of the moment. As India's flag rose up and the British flag came down, a thunderous cheer and a mighty shout of 'Jai Hind', filled the sky.

Similar scenes occurred at the capitals of every province. In Madhya Pradesh at five minutes past midnight of the 14th-15th August 1947, Free India's first Governor of the Province, Mangaldas M. Pakwasa took the oath of office to the chanting of solemn hymns. Next morning a huge multitude the like of which had not been seen in Nagpur before, assembled at the foot of the historic fort of Sitabuldi on which the Chief Minister, Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla, hoisted the national flag. Thus was redeemed the surrender of this ancient territory 130 years ago. The fort which in 1817 had been captured from Appa Sahib by the British conquerors was won again by the people of the country. The senior descendant of the House of Bhonsle, Raja Raghoji Rao Bhonsle, publicly declared his gratitude to the people for this achievement. Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla said on that occasion: "The freedom we have won is not of any section, party or community, but of every man, woman and child who inhabits this ancient land. We should now pledge ourselves anew to the service of our Motherland and march united, with trust in God and faith in ourselves, with goodwill to all and malice toward none to the great destiny which is awaiting us". Thus freedom came with jubilation and high hopes, transcending the sorrows and sufferings that partition brought in its wake. Through the length and breadth of the country the lustre of myriad-coloured illuminations reflected the bright hopes that filled our hearts. The long and perilous path of the struggle had come to an end, and it was now possible for the children of the soil to write a new chapter in the glorious history of our Nation in words that will endure.

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## APPENDIX

### MARTYRS OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT

“ शहीदों की चिताओं पर, जुड़ेंगे हर बरस मेले ।  
वतन पर मरनेवालों का, यही बाकी निशा होगा ॥ ”

#### Nagpur—

1. Ganpat Jairam, shot dead.
2. Shankar Balkrishna Bangde, shot dead.
3. Shah Usman Yakubmiya, shot dead.
4. Kallu Naik, shot dead.
5. Arjun Devidin Pardeshi, shot dead.
6. Panjabrao Anandrao Vadar, shot dead.
7. Amaria Tailor, shot dead.
8. Shankar Dajiba Mhali, hanged.
9. Janrao Salukar, died in jail.
10. Baji Rao, died in jail.
11. Chintaman Parkade, Nagardhan, died in jail.
12. Shivram Ukandrao Kondhali, died in jail.
13. Lahanu Kalmeshwar, died after release.

#### Wardha—

1. Keshao Appa Bongirwar, Kharangana (Arvi), shot dead
2. Gangaram Nagpure, Khadki, died in jail.
3. Uttamrao Mohanaji Ambedkar, Kishala, died in jail.
4. Ambadas Laxmandas Rathi, Khadki, died in detention.
5. Baburao Bakaram Jawale, died in jail.
6. Gunda Ramji, Nagpur, Khadki, died of Police beating.
7. Laxman Ramchandra Gothane, Arvi, died after release.
8. Fatekhan Yasinkhan, Arvi, died after release.
9. Bulakidas Jajoo, Arvi, died after police beating.

#### Chanda—

1. Balaji Raghoba Barai, Chimur, shot dead.
2. Banulal Panchamsingh, Chimur, shot dead.
3. Dalip Singh, Kshatriya, Chimur, shot dead.
4. Son of Narayan Rao Barai, Chimur, shot dead.
5. Ramji Koshti, Chimur, shot dead.
6. Kumar Raipurkar, Chimur, shot dead.

**Bhandara—**

1. Shri Ram Ramji, Teli, Tumsar, shot dead
2. Bhadu Ram Kunbi, Tumsar, shot dead.
3. Nago Kashi Ram, Tumsar, shot dead.
4. Hari Fagu Sunar, Tumsar, shot dead.
5. Baburao Parasram Kalar, Lohanmendri, shot dead.
6. Kalicharan Mataprasad Agrawal, Bopawadi (Sakoli), died in jail.
7. Shankar Dayal Mishra, Tirora, died in jail.
8. Pandu Dhondha Koshti, Sangadi, died in jail.
9. Kashinath Tailor, Sangadi, died in jail.
10. Adku Teli, Sangadi, died in jail.
11. Ramchandra Janku, died after release.
12. Hiralal Sampatlal, died after release.
13. Ganpatrao Chutke, Bhandara, wounded and died.
14. Kashinath Jagannath Teli, Mohali, died after release.

**Jabalpur—**

1. Gulabsingh Laxman Singh, Jabalpur, shot dead.
2. Gulabsingh, Gorakhpur, Jabalpur, shot dead.
3. Nandbehari Mathuraprasad Pande, Kusgaon, died in jail.
4. Guljarilal Kunjilal Sunar, Katni, died in jail.
5. Jankiprasad, (Piparia Kalan) Katni, died in jail.
6. Swarajprasad Verma, Jabalpur, died in jail.
7. Purushottamdas Vairagi, died in jail.
8. Bhavaniprasad Mulairam Dhiwar, Majhgavan, died after release.
9. Mannalal Kodulal Bani, Katni, died after release.

**Mandla—**

1. Udaichand Jain, Mandla, shot dead.

**Sagar—**

1. Sabulal Sukhlal Jain, Garhakota, shot dead.
2. Shaligram Tiwari, Sagar, died after release.
3. Premchand Balchand Singhai, Semara Buzurg, died after release.
4. Bhaiyalal Chaudhari, died after release.

**Raipur—**

1. Manglu Lamakeni, died in firing.
2. Rukhamani Bai, Easshi Bahara, died in jail.
3. Ramadhin Mistri, Bhatapara, died after release.
4. Rupa Bai, Lavan, died after release.
5. Vishal Ram, Sitapar, died after release.
6. Bhagwati Bai, Bangoli, died after release.
7. Basukwaro Bai died after release.
8. Bhansingh Gour, Nagri, died after release.
9. Biraj Marar, Belor, died after release.
10. Pandati Teli, Sankore, died after release.
11. Laxman Shiocharan Pilley, Mahasamund, died after release.
12. Ratanji, Boriajohar, died after release.
13. Bodhan Gond, Amolidih, died after release.
14. Ramachandra Pathak, Lohardih, died after release.
15. Jamnalal Chopada, Raipur, died after release.
16. Ramdas student, Raipur, died after release.
17. Rukhmani Bai, Raipur, died after release.

**Betul—**

1. Birsa Gond, Behadi (Ghoradongari) shot dead.
2. Kaila Kirar, Nahia, shot dead.
3. Mahadeo Gaotya 'Teli, Prabhat Pattan, shot dead.
4. Udyia Kirar, Nahia, shot dead.
5. Komasingh Gond, Banjaridhal, shot dead.
6. Makadu Gond, Jambada, shot dead.
7. Ranu Gond, Barangwadi, shot dead.
8. Munshi Gond, Behadi, died in jail.
9. Jirra Gond, Salidhana, died in jail.
10. Golman Seth, Chicholi, died in jail.
11. Punnasingh Gond, Mahendwadi, died in jail.
12. Manohar Rao Paunikar, Multai, died after release.
13. Lakkhu Gond, Vijaigram, died after release.
14. Tatra Gond, Bhainsdehi, died after release.

### **Chhindwara—**

1. Pruddle Bai, Turia, shot dead in 1930.
2. Demo Bai, Turia, shot dead in 1930.
3. Birju Bhoi, Turia, shot dead in 1930.
4. Reno Bai, Turia, died in hospital.
5. Nathu Laxman Gosai, Sausar, died in jail.
6. Abdul Rahman, Chhindwara, died in jail.
7. Raja Ram Shukla, Chhindwara, died in jail.
8. Swami Shyamanand, Amarwada, died in jail.
9. Badal Bhoi, died after release.
10. Waman Rao Patel, Banoda, died after release.

### **Hoshangabad**

1. Mansa Ram, Kasera, Chichali, shot dead.
2. Premchand, Kasera, Chichali, died of Police beating.
3. Sukhlal Kasera, Chichali, died of Police beating.
4. Indarjit Gusain, Rampur, died in Jail.
5. Rudrapratap Singh, Manegaon, died in Jail.
6. Onkarsingh Baldeosingh Bundela, Banehari, died after release.
7. Deviprasad Pachori, Bohari, died after release.

### **Nimar**

1. S. M. Agarkar, Khandwa, died after release.

### **Bilaspur**

1. Dasa Ram Phulmali, Waraseoni, shot dead.
2. Krishnachandra Verma, Bilaspur, died after release.
3. Ajablal Bhandari, Lodhi Mohgaon, Bilaspur, died after release.
4. Sohru Gowara, Karli (Lalbarra), died after release.

### **Durg**

1. Ramadhin Gond, Dongargaon, shot dead.
2. Thakur Ram Naresh Kumar, Salud, died in Jail.
3. Parmanand Kurmi, Akhra (Pattan), died after release.
4. Jivanlal Brahmine, Sirsa, died after release.
5. Ramprasad Deshmukh, Pinkapar, died after release.

**Amravati**

1. Waman Rao Patil, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
2. Mahadeo Atmaram Phandane, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
3. Mahadeo Jagoba Bapmare, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
4. Ramrao Laxman Gohad, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
5. Shesh Rao Nathuji Mudholkar, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
6. Tukaram Rodha, Ittamgaon, shot dead.
7. Pandurang Laxman Malpe, Loni, shot dead.
8. Mahadeo Bhagwanji Barmase, Benoda, shot dead.
9. Vinayakrao Daulatrao Awale, Benoda, shot dead.
10. Kesharao Tathode, Belora, shot dead.
11. Dr. Govindrao Malpe, Ashti, shot dead.
12. Shri Lohe, Ashti, shot dead.
13. Abdul Rashid, Ashti, shot dead.
14. Udaibhan Kukde, Wadala, shot dead.
15. Kesharao Dhonge, Wadala, shot dead.
16. Panchhi Gond, Wadala, shot dead.
17. Gulab Rao Dhude Patil, Wadala, died of Police beating.
18. Bakaram Patil Wadala, died of Police beating.
19. Mahadeorao Shravan Deshmukh, Ashti, died in jail.
20. Bakaram Vithuji, Ashti, died in jail.
21. Maroti Gurav, Ashti, died in Betul jail.
22. Pakhu Kaner, Ashti, committed suicide on account of unbearable Pain of Police beating.

**Akola**

1. Laxman Bhikaji Godbole, Akola, died in Jail.
2. Narayan Sadashio, Akot, died in Jail.
3. Narayan Bhagat, Wadegaon, died on the way of Delhi, as individual Satyagrahi.
4. Mohanlal Munnalal Shrivastava, Kamargaon, died after release.

**Buldhana**

1. Sidheshwar Ganesh Gore, Pleader, Buldhana, killed by stone.
2. Jagdeo Rao Patil, Nandura, murdered.
3. Laxman Pachghare, Shegaon, died in Jail.

**Yeotmal**

1. Palekar, Yeotmal, died in Jail.
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